ALL ABOUT HISTORY™

THE REAL FRANKENSTEIN

Science and technology that inspired Shelley

THE SCOURGE OF GOD

ATTILA

Uncover the all-conquering Hun king whose nomadic horde terrorised Rome

VOODOO QUEEN

Why Marie Laveau is New Orleans folk hero

THE LADY POPE

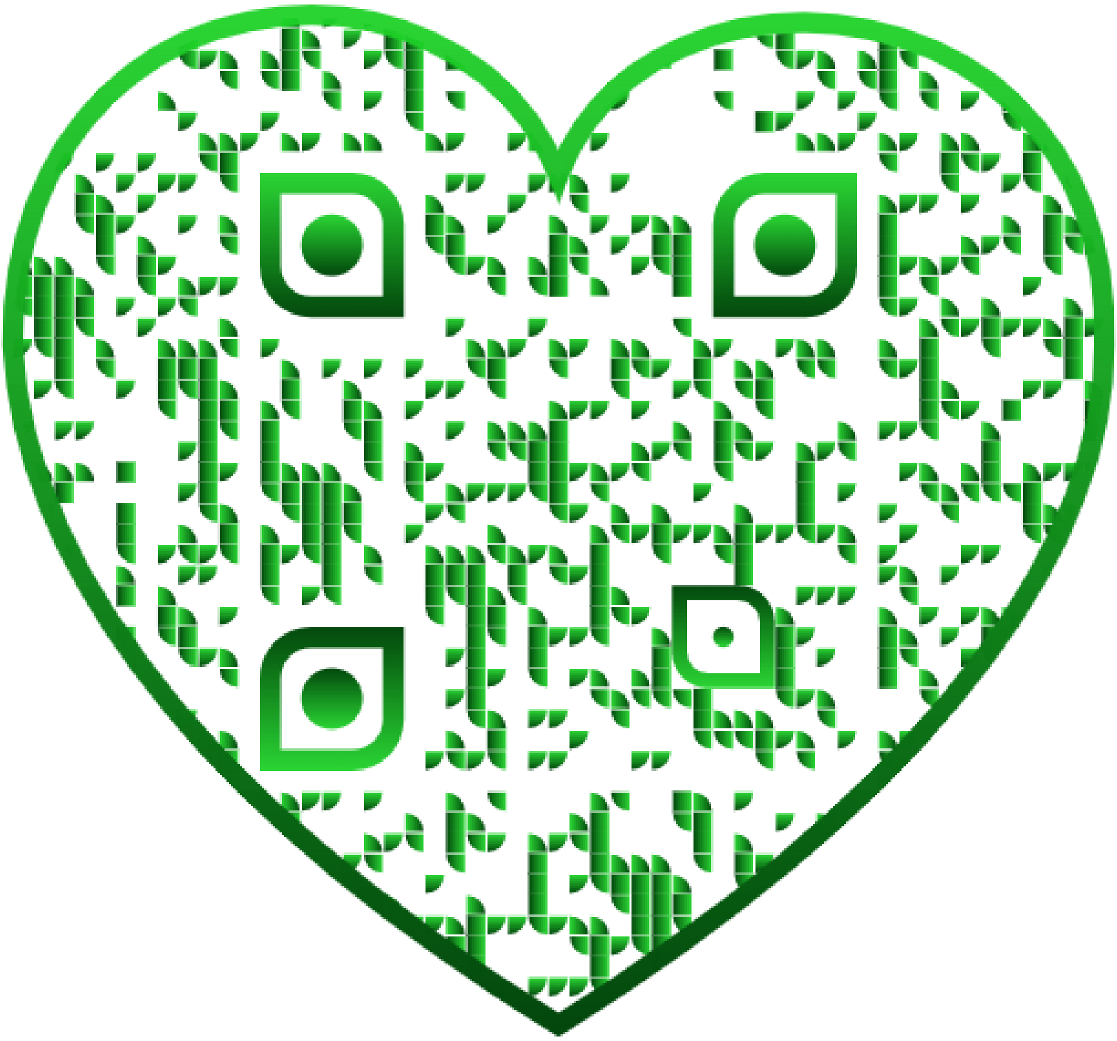
How one woman gained power in the Vatican

JUNGLE COMMANDOS

Why it was Burma or bust for Britain in WWII

PLUS HISTORY OF MUSLIM SPAIN THE INCA EARTHSHAKER WHAT IF AMERICA STAYED OUT OF WWI? DARK LONDON

ISSUE 162
PRINTED IN THE UK £5.80
62>
9 772052 587068



Sink different.

AUTOMATIC
300m|1000ft
8
5
10
15
20
25
30
35
40
45
50
55

The thinking behind the **C60 Trident Pro 300** was simple. Design the best dive watch. Period. So we did our research. We looked, learned and listened. To our customers. To diving professionals. (Even to the sound of myriad bezel actions - we think ours is a close second). The result? A 300m water-resistant case that's strong and light - thanks to a sapphire crystal caseback. This protects its reliable, accurate Swiss movement. Which drives sculpted hands over liberally-lumed, applied indices and one of four dial colours. It's available in three sizes, on an array of quick-release straps or bracelets. And at a price that won't give you a sinking feeling.

Do your research

Christopher
Ward

christopherward.com

ALL ABOUT HISTORY

Future PLC Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA

Editorial
Editor **Jonathan Gordon**
jonathan.gordon@futurenet.com
Art Editor **Kym Winters**
Features Editor **Callum McKelvie**
Staff Writer **Emily Staniforth**
Production Editor **Iain Noble**
Editor in Chief **Tim Williamson**
Senior Art Editor **Duncan Crook**

Contributors
Prit Buttar, Martyn Conterio, Catherine Curzon, Mark Dolan,
Iain MacGregor, Miguel Miranda

Cover images
Rocío Espín Piñar, Alamy, Getty Images

Photography and illustration
Rocío Espín Piñar, Kevin McGivern, Adrian Mann,
Adobe Stock, Alamy, Getty Images, Shutterstock
All copyrights and trademarks are recognised and respected.

Advertising
Media packs are available on request
Advertising Sales Director **Lara Jaggon**
lara.jaggon@futurenet.com | **+44 (0)7515 961911**
Sales Executive **Jasmine Aldridge**
jasmine.aldridge@futurenet.com

International Licensing
All About History is available for licensing and syndication.
To find out more contact us at **licensing@futurenet.com** or
view our available content at **www.futurecontenthub.com**
Head of Print Licensing **Rachel Shaw**

Subscriptions
Online orders **www.magazinesdirect.com**
Consumer Revenues Directors **Sharon Todd**
Past Issues: If you are an active subscriber, you have instant access to past issues through your iOS or Android device/s. You will only be able to access the digital past issues while your subscription remains active.
New orders and customer service queries email: **help@mymagazine.co.uk**
Magazinesdirect.com is owned and operated by Future Publishing Limited.
Manage your subscription online with MyMagazine.co.uk.
Visit **www.mymagazine.co.uk/FAQ** to view frequently asked questions

Circulation
Head of Newstrade **Emma Bone**

Production
Head of Production **Mark Constance**
Senior Production Manager **Matt Eglinton**
Senior Ad Production Manager **Jo Crosby**
Digital Editions Controller **Jason Hudson**
Production Manager **Nola Cokely**

Management
SVP Knowledge & Science **Joel Griffiths**
Commercial Finance Director **Tom Swayne**
Managing Director **Dave Clutterbuck**
Head of Design **Dean Usher**

Printed by William Gibbons & Sons

Distributed by Marketforce UK, 121-141 Westbourne Terrace,
London, W2 6QA www.marketforce.co.uk

ISSN 2052-5870

UK annual subscription price is £74.75. The European annual subscription price is €158. The US annual subscription price is $178.

We are committed to only using magazine paper which is derived from responsibly managed, certified forestry and chlorine-free manufacture. The paper in this magazine was sourced and produced from sustainable managed forests, conforming to strict environmental and socioeconomic standards. All contents © 2025 Future Publishing Limited or published under licence. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be used, stored, transmitted or reproduced in any way without the prior written permission of the publisher. Future Publishing Limited (company number 2008885) is registered in England and Wales. Registered office: Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA. All information contained in this publication is for information only and is, as far as we are aware, correct at the time of going to press. Future cannot accept any responsibility for errors or inaccuracies in such information. You are advised to contact manufacturers and retailers directly with regard to the price of products/services referred to in this publication. Apps and websites mentioned in this publication are not under our control. We are not responsible for their contents or any other changes or updates to them. This magazine is fully independent and not affiliated in any way with the companies mentioned herein.

If you submit material to us, you warrant that you own the material and/or have the necessary rights/permissions to supply the material and you automatically grant Future and its licensees a licence to publish your submission in whole or in part in any/all issues and/or editions of publications, in any format published worldwide and on associated websites, social media channels and associated products. Any material you submit is sent at your own risk and, although every care is taken, neither Future nor its employees, agents, subcontractors or licensees shall be liable for loss or damage. We assume all unsolicited material is for publication unless otherwise stated, and reserve the right to edit, amend, adapt all submissions.

GPSR EU RP (for authorities only): eucomply OÜ Pärnu mnt 139b-14 11317, Tallinn, Estonia, hello@eucompliancepartner.com, +3375690241

General Product Safety 2023/988: The use of our product under normal or reasonably foreseeable conditions of use, including the actual duration of use, does not present any risk or only the minimum risks compatible with the product's use, which are considered acceptable and consistent with a high level of protection of the health and safety of consumers.

All About History (ISSN 2052-5870, USPS XXXXX) is published monthly with an extra copy in October by Future plc, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA.

Airfreight and mailing in the USA by agent named World Container Inc., c/o BBT 150-15, 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA. Periodicals postage paid at Brooklyn, NY 11256.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Future plc, c/o World Container Inc., c/o BBT 150-15, 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA.

All About History is a member of the IPSO (Independent Press Standards Organisation) which regulates the UK print and digital news industry.

We abide by the Editors' Code of Practice and are committed to upholding the highest standards of journalism. If you think that we have not met those standards and want to make a complaint, please contact legal@futurenet.com

If we are unable to resolve your complaint, or if you would like more information about IPSO or the Editors' Code, contact IPSO on 0300 123 2220 or visit www.ipso.co.uk

Widely Recycled

ipso. Regulated

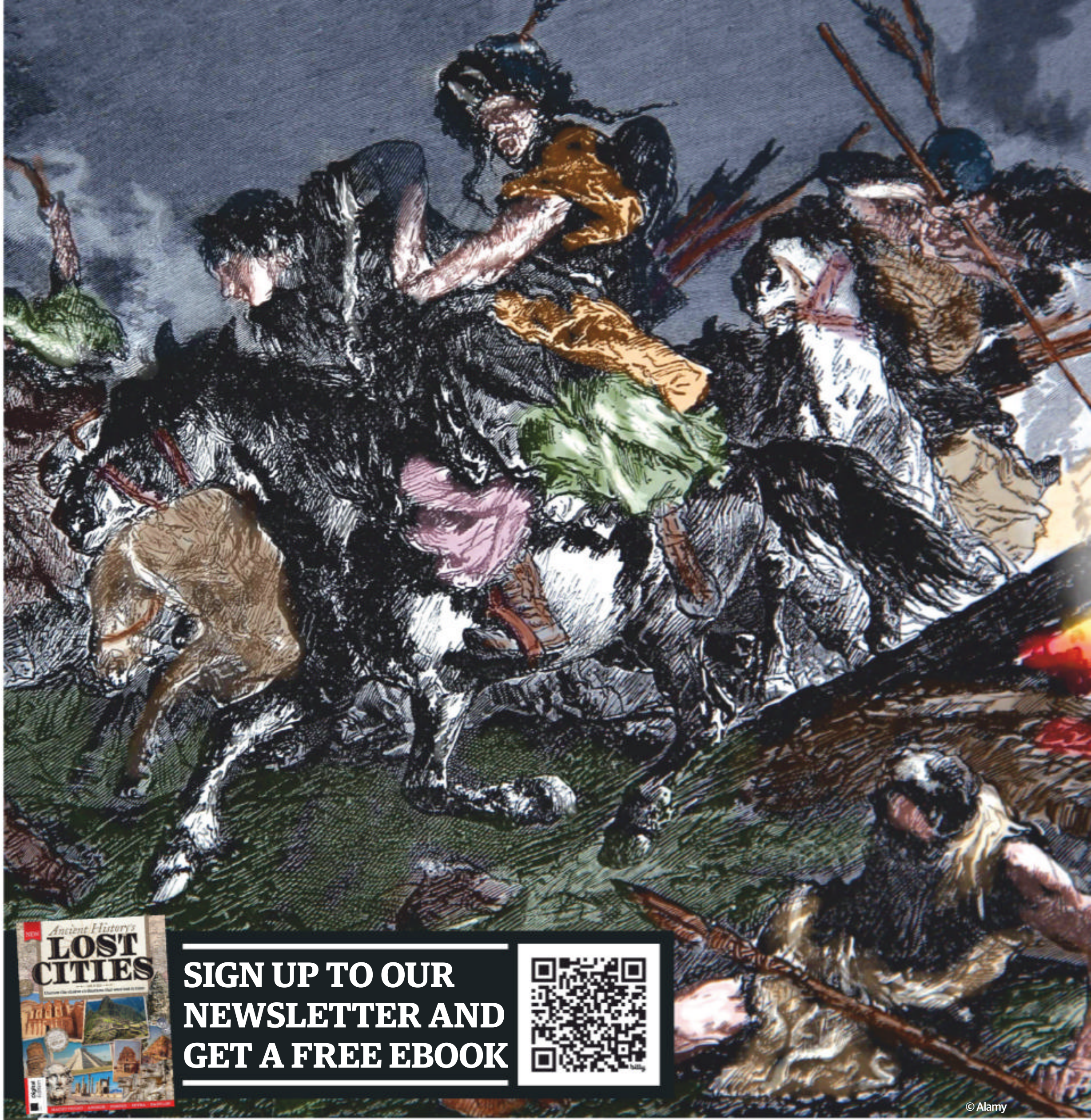
FUTURE

Connectors.
Creators.
Experience
Makers.

Future plc is a public
company quoted on the
London Stock Exchange
(symbol: FUTR)
www.futureplc.com

Chief Executive Officer **Kevin Li Ying**
Non-Executive Chairman **Richard Huntingford**
Chief Financial Officer **Sharjeel Suleman**

Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244



Ancient History's LOST CITIES

SIGN UP TO OUR NEWSLETTER AND GET A FREE EBOOK

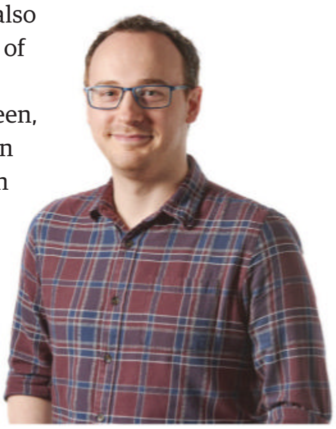
© Alamy

Some Romans saw Attila as a punishment for their sins

Welcome

Investigating Roman history is a great case study in the kind of precautions we have to take when reading about the past from those who either lived through it or close to it. We're fortunate to have a fair amount of Roman historical writing to tell us about the events and people that impacted this part of the ancient world, but can it all be trusted? For the longest time a great deal of it was, not least the way in which rival cultures fell under the moniker of 'barbarians'. It's only relatively recently that historians have begun to question and evaluate that. What were these adversarial groups really like? How advanced were they? What actually made them different from the Romans in their customs, political structures and military tactics? The Huns are a great case for this.

This issue we couldn't ask for a better guide to the story of the Huns and their notorious leader Attila than John Man, who has written extensively on the Huns, Mongols and more over the years. You can also dig into the history of *Frankenstein*, learn about a voodoo queen, discover the woman who ran the Vatican and much more. I hope you enjoy the issue, as always.



Jonathan Gordon
Editor

Find our social media channels and more at **linktr.ee/AllAboutHistory**

CONTENTS

ISSUE 162

26
Attila the Hun
How the 'Scourge of God' terrorised Rome

36
Making a Monster
The evolution of Frankenstein and his creation

42
Burma or Bust
The story of Britain's WWII Jungle Commandos

46
La Papessa
Discover the woman who managed to rule the Vatican

52
The Inca Earthshaker
Learn how Pachacuti expanded his empire and governed

58
The Voodoo Queen
Who was Marie Laveau and how did she become a folk hero?

DEVICE WALLPAPERS
Download now at
bit.ly/AAH162Gifts

Main image: © Getty Images

ALL ABOUT…

12 **Key Events**
History of Al-Andalus

14 **Inside History**
Aljafería Palace

16 **Anatomy**
Al-Andalus civilian

17 **Historical Treasures**
Pyxis of al-Mughira

18 **Hall Of Fame**
Intellectuals of Al-Andalus

20 **Q&A**
Janet Mendel reveals the Al-Andalus influence on food

22 **Places To Explore**
Al-Andalus mosques

Subscribe and save!
Discover our exclusive offer for new readers on page 24

REGULARS

06 **Defining Moments**
Photos with amazing stories

64 **Greatest Battles**
Inside the brutal combat of 'Little Stalingrad', Ortona

70 **What If**
The US stayed out of WWI?

74 **Through History**
London's underworld

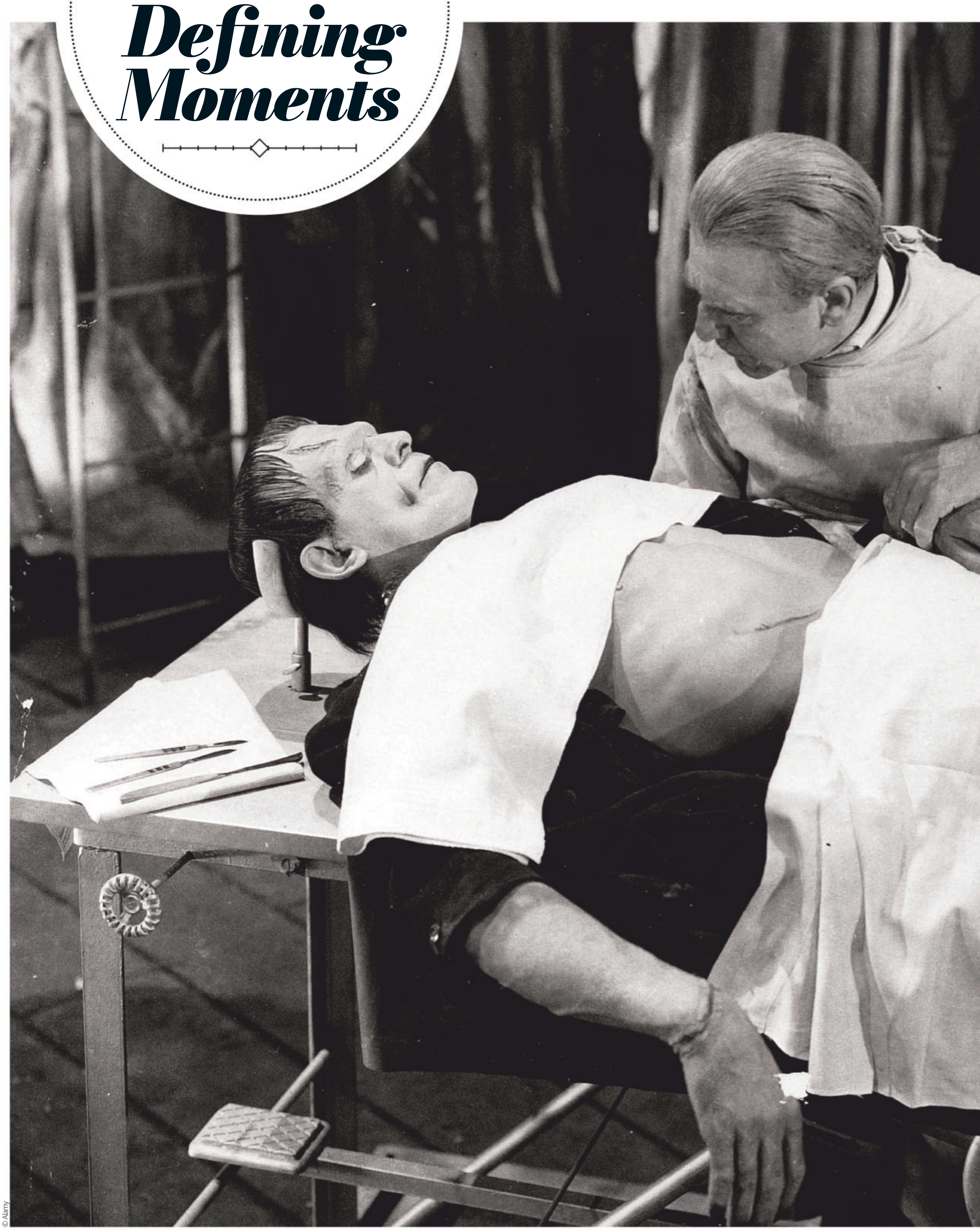
78 **Reviews**
Our verdict on the latest historical books and media

81 **History Vs Hollywood**
Does *Argentina, 1985* stick to the hard evidence?

82 **Recipe**
How to make ajoblanco

52
cuxi. canega –
quinti cançer
paysa cuxi yncca

Defining Moments


© Alamy

21 November 1931

FRANKENSTEIN PREMIERES

Directed by James Whale, the 1931 film *Frankenstein* was released to critical and public acclaim. Based on Mary Shelley's Gothic novel *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818) and its 1927 play adaptation by Peggy Webling, the movie starred Colin Clive as the film's titular scientist and Boris Karloff as Frankenstein's monster. Karloff's interpretation of the character came to define it, and his makeup and performance became iconic. The film's cultural impact and importance was recognised in 1991 when the title was placed on the USA's National Film Registry.

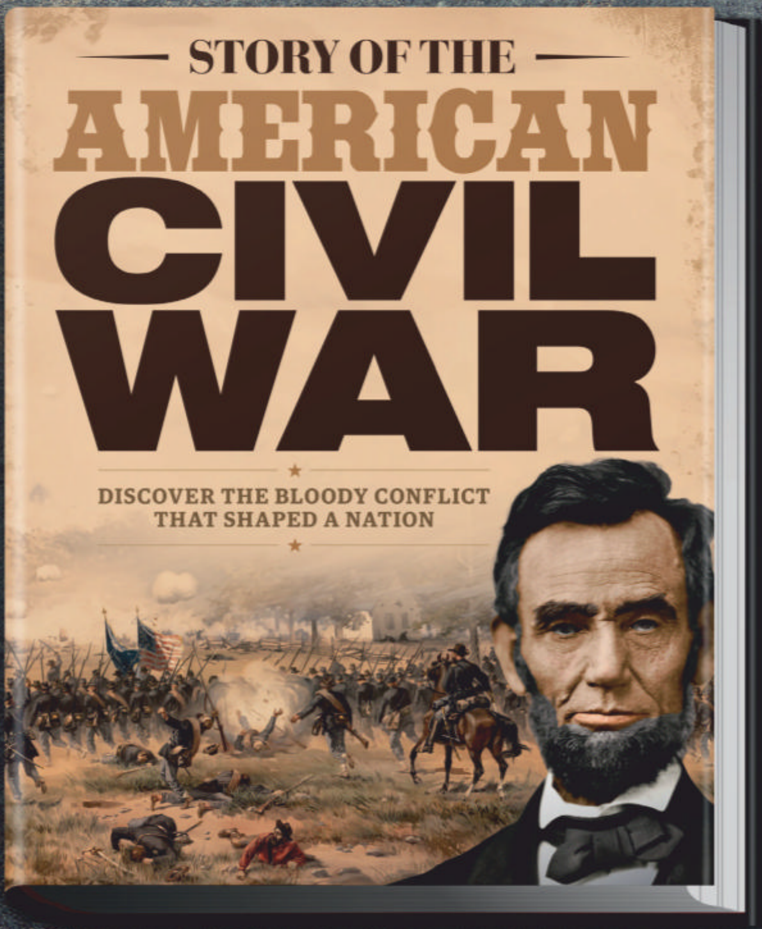
20 November 1992

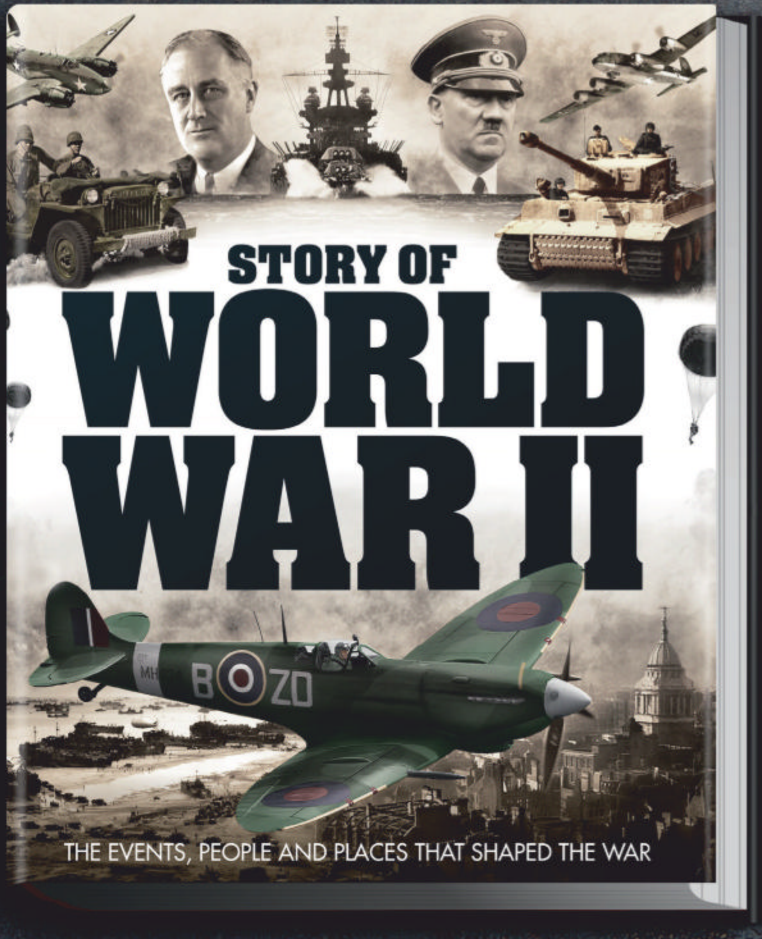
WINDSOR CASTLE CATCHES FIRE

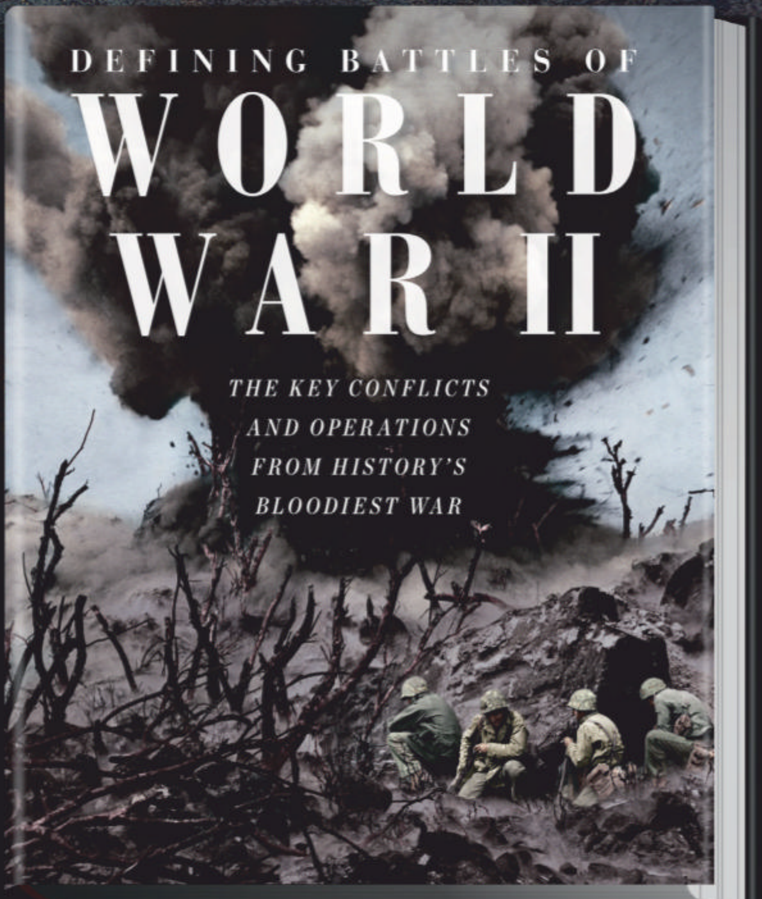
At 11:30am on 20 November 1992 a fire broke out at Windsor Castle, a residence of the British royal family. Having started in Queen Victoria's Private Chapel due to a defective spotlight, the blaze quickly spread to nearby rooms. Staff rushed to evacuate priceless works of art from the castle as 225 firefighters set to work dousing the flames. After being informed about the blaze, Queen Elizabeth II arrived at Windsor at 3pm. By 2.30am the following morning the fire was extinguished, having destroyed 115 rooms.

© Alamy

OUT NOW


STORY OF THE
AMERICAN CIVIL WAR
DISCOVER THE BLOODY CONFLICT THAT SHAPED A NATION


STORY OF
WORLD WAR II
THE EVENTS, PEOPLE AND PLACES THAT SHAPED THE WAR


DEFINING BATTLES OF
WORLD WAR II
THE KEY CONFLICTS AND OPERATIONS FROM HISTORY'S BLOODIEST WAR

★

AVAILABLE FROM ALL GOOD BOOKSTORES

magazinesdirect.com

amazon

ALL ABOUT

AL-ANDALUS

Explore the history and culture of the Iberian Peninsula when it was under Muslim control

14
INSIDE ALJAFERÍA PALACE

16
ANATOMY OF AN AL-ANDALUS CIVILIAN

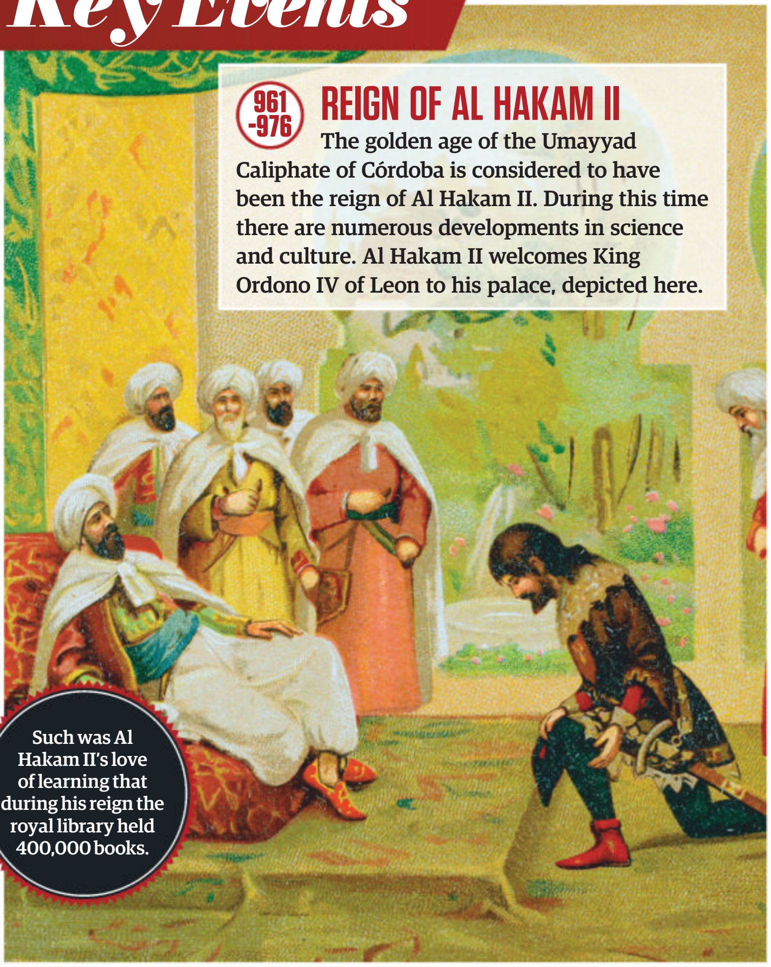
18
INTELLECTUALS OF AL-ANDALUS

20
THE TASTE OF AL-ANDALUS

Main image: © Getty Images

Written by Emily Staniforth, Callum McKelvie, Jonathan Gordon

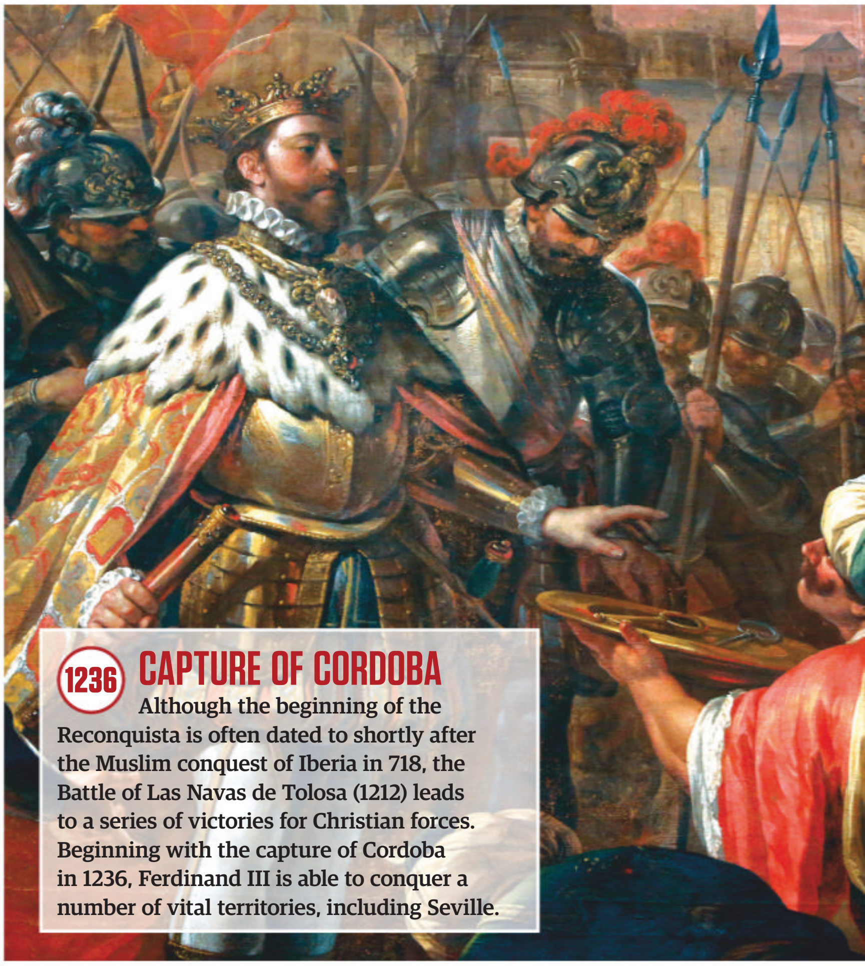
Key Events



961 -976 REIGN OF AL HAKAM II

The golden age of the Umayyad Caliphate of Córdoba is considered to have been the reign of Al Hakam II. During this time there are numerous developments in science and culture. Al Hakam II welcomes King Ordono IV of Leon to his palace, depicted here.

Such was Al Hakam II's love of learning that during his reign the royal library held 400,000 books.



1236 CAPTURE OF CORDOBA

Although the beginning of the Reconquista is often dated to shortly after the Muslim conquest of Iberia in 718, the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa (1212) leads to a series of victories for Christian forces. Beginning with the capture of Cordoba in 1236, Ferdinand III is able to conquer a number of vital territories, including Seville.

711

THE MUSLIM CONQUEST ENDS 718

Most of the Iberian Peninsula is now under the control of the Muslim armies. However, groups of rebels continue to fight against their rule.

IBN FIRNAS BORN 810

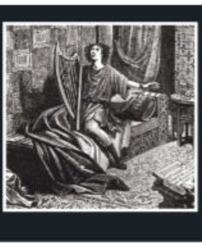
Abbas Ibn Firnas is born in Al Andalus. He becomes one of the region's most famous sons, a polymath who is said to have attempted to fly.

ZIRYAB ARRIVES IN CORDOBA 822

Ziryab arrives in the city of Cordoba from Baghdad. He will instigate many innovations in music, fashion and personal grooming, even helping popularise chess.

THE MARTYRS OF CORDOBA 850 – 859

A number of Mozarabs, the name for Christian groups within Islamic Spain, defy Islamic rule in the city of Cordoba. 48 are captured and summarily executed.



CALIPHATE OF CORDOBA ESTABLISHED 929

Following the deposition of Hisham III, Abd al-Rahman III becomes the first caliph of Cordoba, establishing the Caliphate.

955

961 – 976

AL-ANDALUS WAR 1009

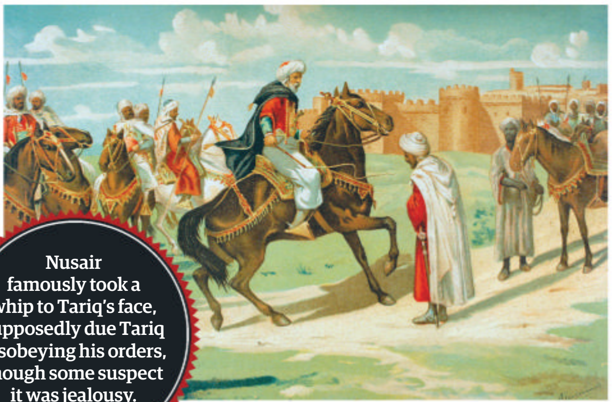
Civil war breaks out in Al-Andalus. By 1031 this will lead to the end of the Umayyad Caliphate, which has ruled for three centuries.

THE FIRST TAIFA KINGDOMS BEGIN TO APPEAR 1031

Following the collapse of the Umayyad Caliphate, Al-Andalus is now comprised of a number of independent kingdoms – they are often at war with one another.

711 MUSLIM CONQUEST OF SPAIN

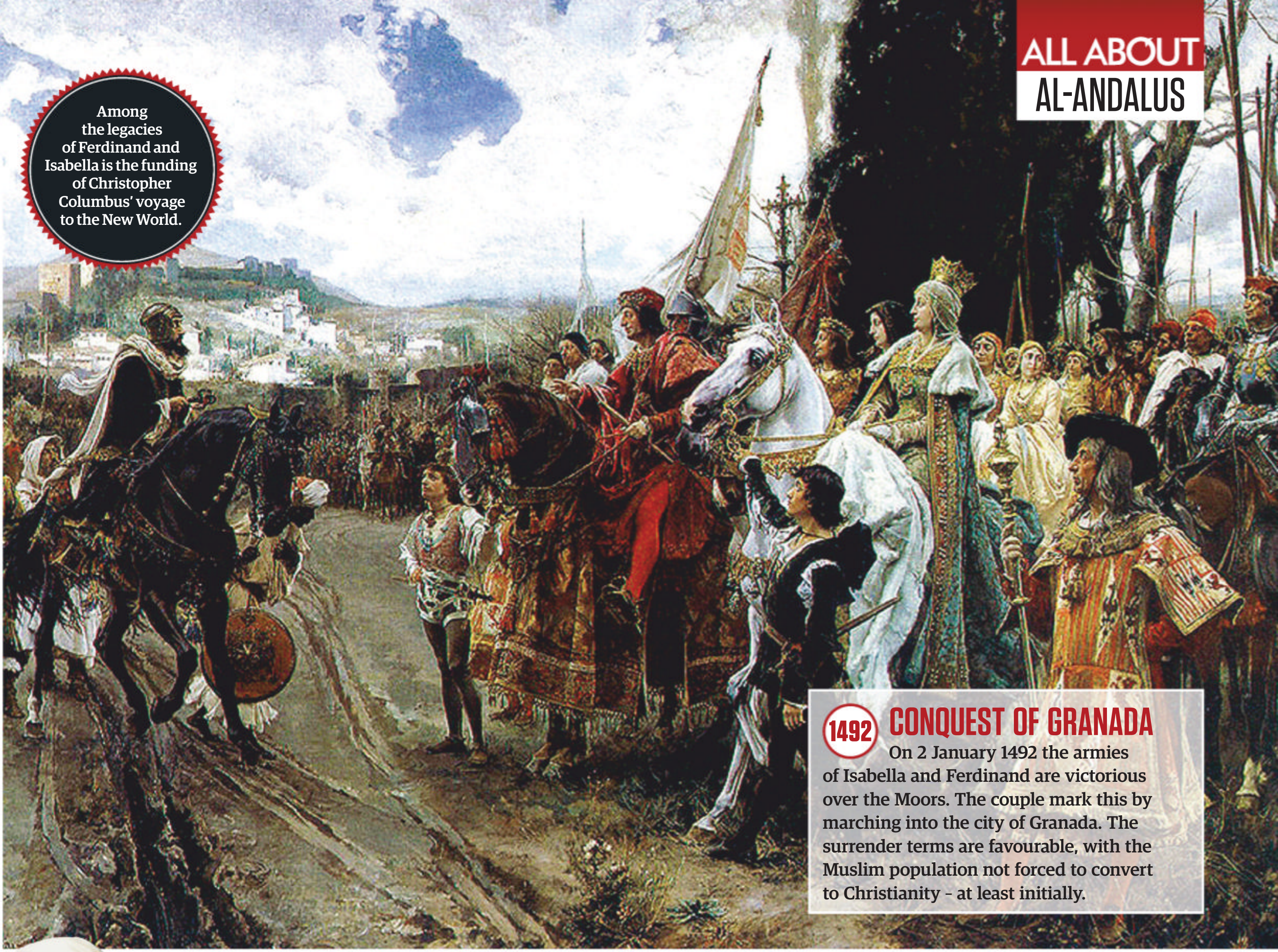
Legend has it that the governor of North Africa, Musa bin Nusair, receives a request for assistance from Count Julian of Ceuta for help against the Visigoths. Nusair sends a young general, Tariq bin Ziyad, who quickly defeats the Visigoths, allowing Muslim forces to conquer most of Spain and Portugal.



Nusair famously took a whip to Tariq's face, supposedly due Tariq disobeying his orders, though some suspect it was jealousy.

955 ALMERIA FOUNDED

Abd al-Rahman III founds the city of Almeria, which was built on earlier establishments. He intends the port town to be a base for his navy, and under his rule Almeria flourishes as a place for trade. He also constructs a fortress, the largest of its kind still standing on the Iberian peninsula.



Among the legacies of Ferdinand and Isabella is the funding of Christopher Columbus' voyage to the New World.

1492 CONQUEST OF GRANADA

On 2 January 1492 the armies of Isabella and Ferdinand are victorious over the Moors. The couple mark this by marching into the city of Granada. The surrender terms are favourable, with the Muslim population not forced to convert to Christianity – at least initially.

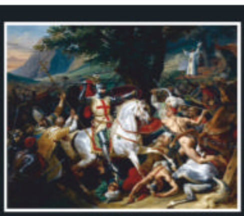
ALMORAVID INVASION 1086

Following Christian expansion, Yusuf ibn Tashfin brings an army from Africa and defeats Alfonso VI of Castile. However, the Almoravids soon invade the peninsula.

1125

BATTLE OF LAS NAVAS DE TOLOSA 1212

Christian forces score a decisive victory over the Almohads, leading to the decline of Muslim rule within the peninsula. In the next five decades most of Al-Andalus is taken.



NASRID DYNASTY OF GRANADA 1232

Although the rest of Spain has now been conquered by Christian forces, Granada remains under the rule of the Islamic Nasrid dynasty and continues to flourish for over two centuries.

1236

CONSTRUCTION BEGINS ON THE ALHAMBRA 1238

Ibn Al-Ahmar begins construction on an opulent palace complex known as the Alhambra. Much of it is later defaced or significantly altered.

1482 1492

REBELLION OF THE ALPUJARRAS 1499 – 1501

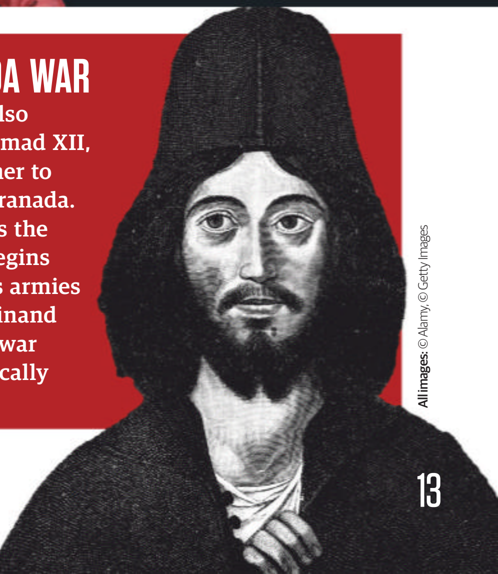
Despite earlier assurances to the contrary, Archbishop Cisneros carries out the forced conversions of Muslims, leading to a number of revolts.

1125 EXPULSION OF THE ANDALUSIAN CHRISTIANS

Alfonso the Battler, the king of Aragon, attacks Granada with the support of Al-Andalus Christians. He is defeated and as punishment Emir Ali Ibn Yusuf sends the Mozarabs into exile into North Africa. The Christian population of Al-Andalus all but disappears.

1482 GRANADA WAR

Boabdil, also known as Muhammad XII, dethrones his father to become emir of Granada. Shortly afterwards the War of Granada begins between Bobadil's armies and those of Ferdinand and Isabella. The war continues sporadically for ten years.



All images: © Alamy, © Getty Images

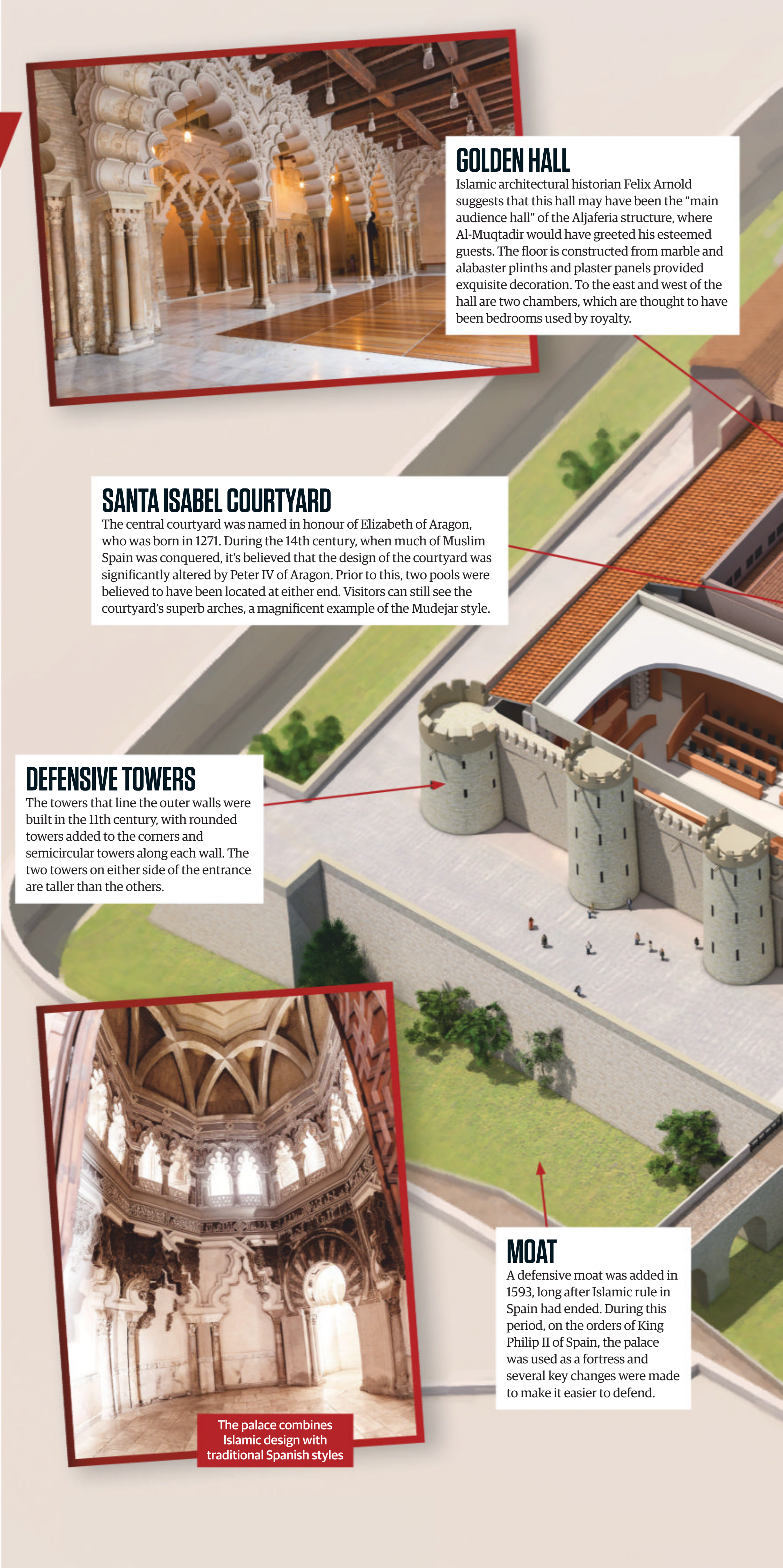
ALJAFERÍA PALACE

Zaragoza, Spain
1065

In Zaragoza in northeast Spain stands Aljaferia Palace, one of the finest surviving examples of Islamic Spain and the only palace from this era that's still largely intact. Within its walls can be found many striking examples of the hybrid Mudejar architecture that is unique to this area, combining Islamic design with traditional Spanish styles.

Built during the 11th century, the palace was originally constructed to be a place of leisure, though it has served many purposes over the subsequent centuries, from royal residence to military barracks. At one point it even hosted the notorious Spanish Inquisition. The palace was commissioned by Al-Muqtadir when Zaragoza was one of the many tariffs in Muslim Spain. These tariffs were independent principalities, each ruled by a different emir. Due to the original purpose of the palace it was known as Qsar al-Surur, which roughly translates as The Palace of Joy.

After the fall of Muslim Spain, Aljaferia became the home of the Christian kings, with a new palace constructed within its walls. A period as a barracks during the 18th century left it in disrepair and significant historical restoration occurred during the 1940s. The site also features the chambers of the Cortes of Aragon, the regional council. First founded in the 12th century, the Cortes was disbanded in 1707 but was reestablished in 1983. Four years later the Cortes established a chamber inside the historic palace that has remained there ever since. In 2001 the Aljaferia Palace was classified a UNESCO World Heritage site.



GOLDEN HALL

Islamic architectural historian Felix Arnold suggests that this hall may have been the "main audience hall" of the Aljaferia structure, where Al-Muqtadir would have greeted his esteemed guests. The floor is constructed from marble and alabaster plinths and plaster panels provided exquisite decoration. To the east and west of the hall are two chambers, which are thought to have been bedrooms used by royalty.

SANTA ISABEL COURTYARD

The central courtyard was named in honour of Elizabeth of Aragon, who was born in 1271. During the 14th century, when much of Muslim Spain was conquered, it's believed that the design of the courtyard was significantly altered by Peter IV of Aragon. Prior to this, two pools were believed to have been located at either end. Visitors can still see the courtyard's superb arches, a magnificent example of the Mudejar style.

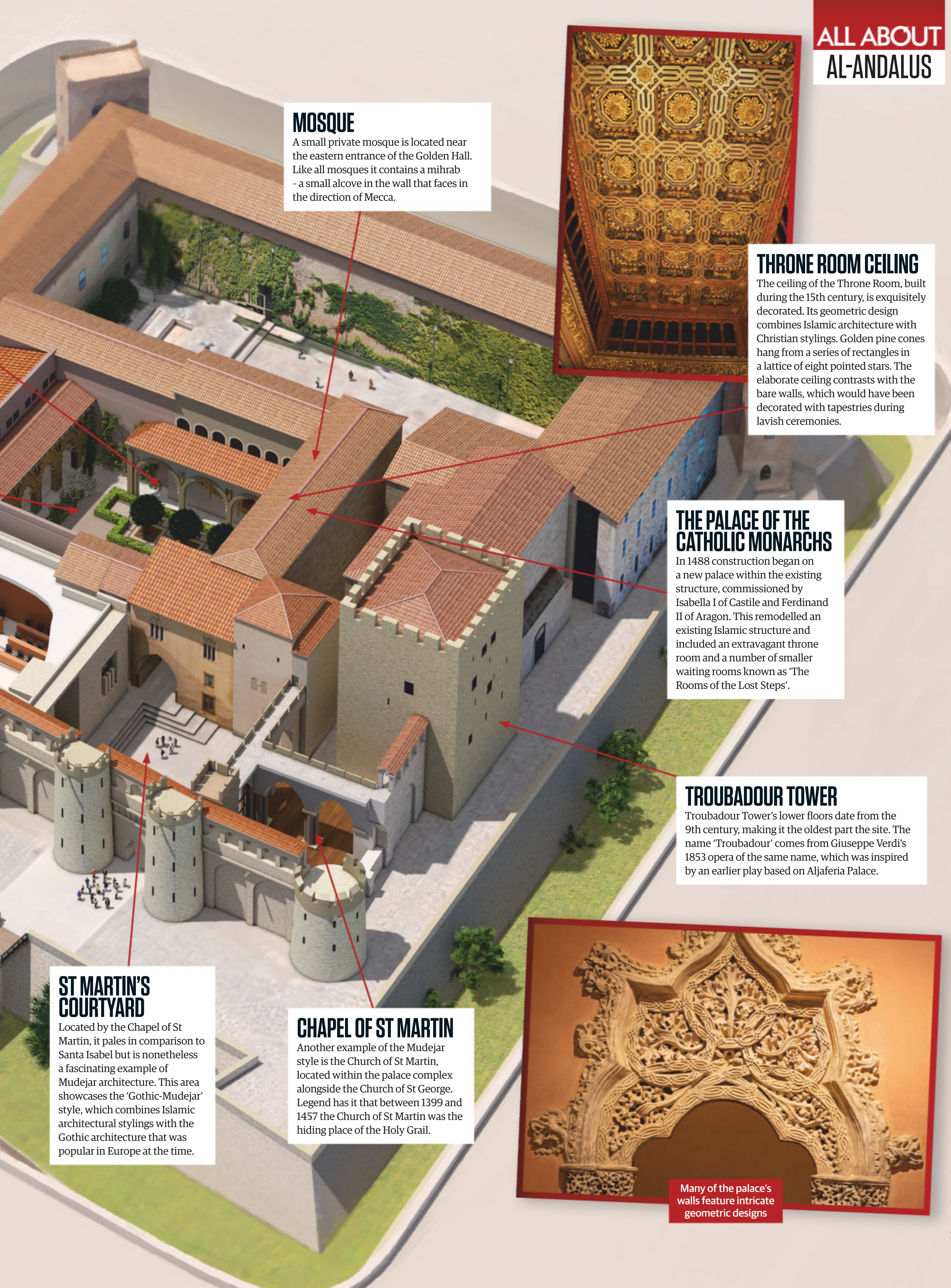
DEFENSIVE TOWERS

The towers that line the outer walls were built in the 11th century, with rounded towers added to the corners and semicircular towers along each wall. The two towers on either side of the entrance are taller than the others.

MOAT

A defensive moat was added in 1593, long after Islamic rule in Spain had ended. During this period, on the orders of King Philip II of Spain, the palace was used as a fortress and several key changes were made to make it easier to defend.

The palace combines Islamic design with traditional Spanish styles



MOSQUE

A small private mosque is located near the eastern entrance of the Golden Hall. Like all mosques it contains a mihrab – a small alcove in the wall that faces in the direction of Mecca.

THRONE ROOM CEILING

The ceiling of the Throne Room, built during the 15th century, is exquisitely decorated. Its geometric design combines Islamic architecture with Christian stylings. Golden pine cones hang from a series of rectangles in a lattice of eight pointed stars. The elaborate ceiling contrasts with the bare walls, which would have been decorated with tapestries during lavish ceremonies.

THE PALACE OF THE CATHOLIC MONARCHS

In 1488 construction began on a new palace within the existing structure, commissioned by Isabella I of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon. This remodelled an existing Islamic structure and included an extravagant throne room and a number of smaller waiting rooms known as 'The Rooms of the Lost Steps'.

TROUBADOUR TOWER

Troubadour Tower's lower floors date from the 9th century, making it the oldest part the site. The name 'Troubadour' comes from Giuseppe Verdi's 1853 opera of the same name, which was inspired by an earlier play based on Aljaferia Palace.

ST MARTIN'S COURTYARD

Located by the Chapel of St Martin, it pales in comparison to Santa Isabel but is nonetheless a fascinating example of Mudejar architecture. This area showcases the 'Gothic-Mudejar' style, which combines Islamic architectural stylings with the Gothic architecture that was popular in Europe at the time.

CHAPEL OF ST MARTIN

Another example of the Mudejar style is the Church of St Martin, located within the palace complex alongside the Church of St George. Legend has it that between 1399 and 1457 the Church of St Martin was the hiding place of the Holy Grail.

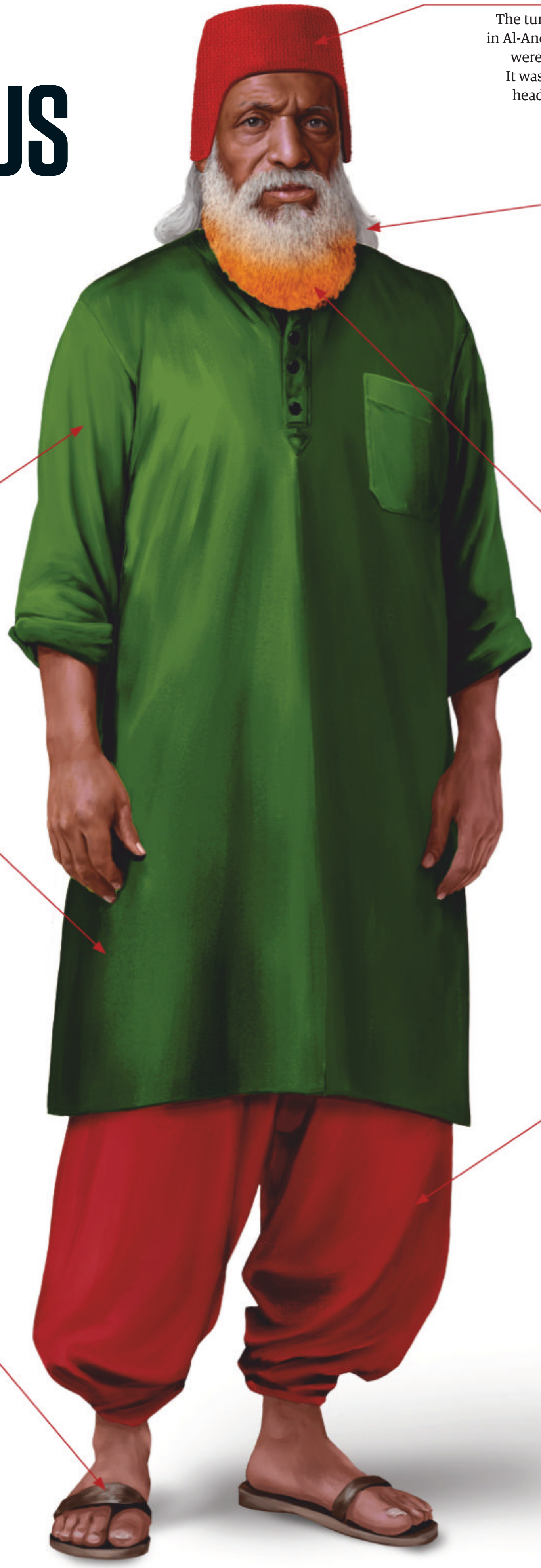
Many of the palace's walls feature intricate geometric designs

Illustration by: Adrian Mann Insets: © Alamy
We have endeavoured to be as accurate as possible in our depiction, but some creative licence has also been applied

Anatomy

AL-ANDALUS CIVILIAN

Al-Andalus
c.9th century



HEADWEAR

The turban was at this stage not commonplace in Al-Andalus. Instead, wool caps in red or green were worn by men and women of all classes. It was equally common for people to wear no headgear at all, likely due to the hot climate.

HAIRCUT

Upon arriving in the capital city Cordoba, Ziryab immediately turned heads as he was said to sport a distinctive haircut that covered his forehead but left his ears exposed. This shorter hairstyle quickly became popular among the affluent men and women of Cordoba.

THE INFLUENCE OF ZIRYAB

Ziryab was a medieval poet, singer and early 'fashion icon'. Born in Baghdad in 789, when he arrived in Al-Andalus he brought with him numerous innovations in clothing, such as the concept of lighter garments in summer and darker clothing for the winter months.

BEARDS

Ziryab popularised personal grooming. For men, this included cutting, trimming and even dying parts of their beards with brightly coloured henna. Other personal grooming introduced by Ziryab included cutting and trimming hair, and a rudimentary form of toothpaste.

JUBBA

In the summer, as depicted here, people would wear long robes known as jubba, made from brightly coloured silks. The jubba was a standard item of clothing for men and women, with numerous items worn by both sexes.

SIRWAL

These loose-fitting trousers were worn by men and women. In the 9th century they were recommended by the scholar Ibn Habib as a means "to protect the modesty of women in the event of a fall or some similar incident".

FOOTWEAR

A rudimentary form of footwear similar to contemporary thong sandals was worn during the summer. But this was not the only option and some civilians wore slippers instead. Leather boots were worn during the winter, as the Islamic invasion had introduced many advancements in Al-Andalus' leather industry.

Illustration: Kevin McGivern

Historical Treasures

PYXIS OF AL-MUGHIRA

This small ivory box is a reminder of Umayyad luxury craftsmanship in Al-Andalus

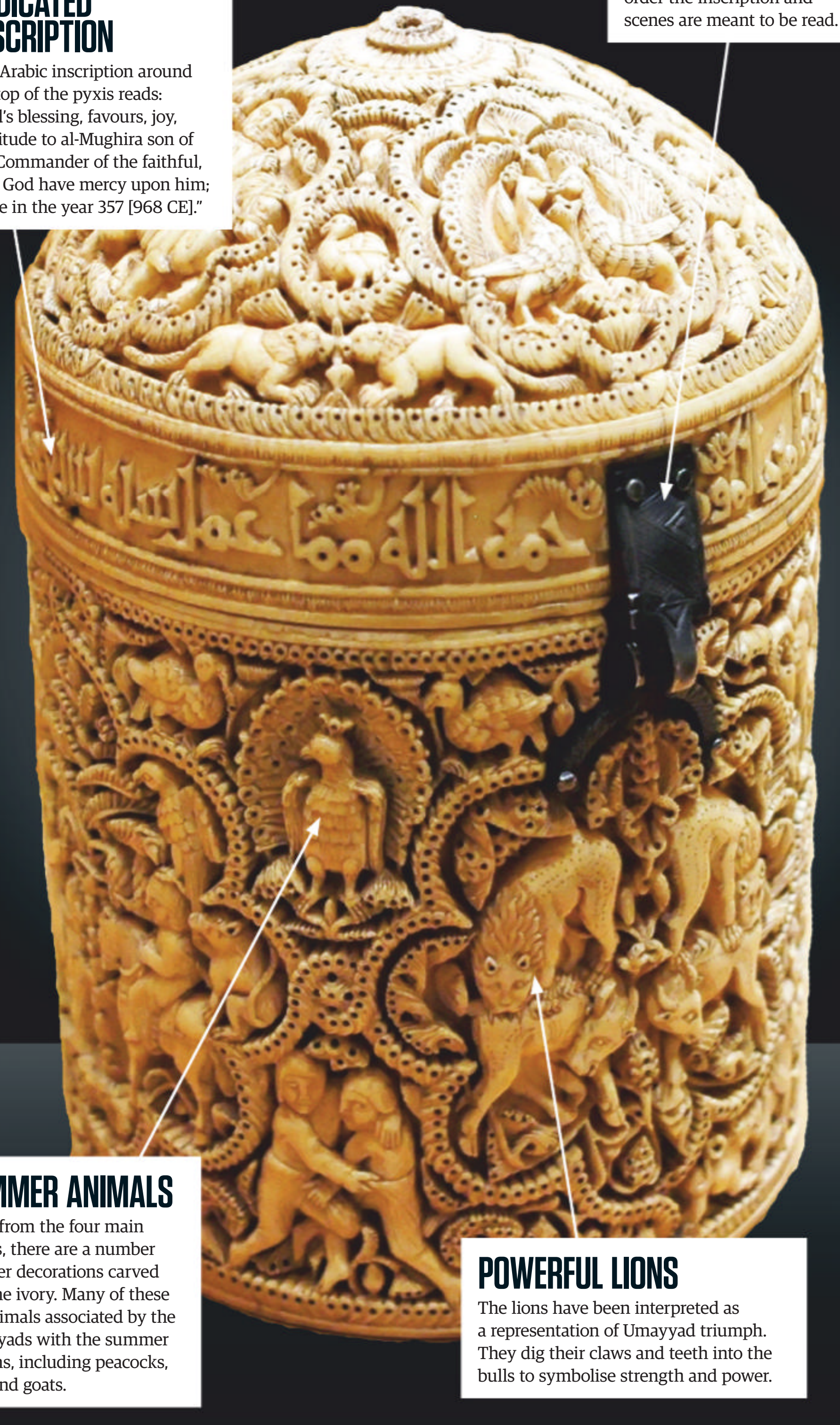
Al-Andalus, 968

The Umayyad Caliphate ruled the Iberian Peninsula for 275 years from 756 to 1031. During this period, art and architecture flourished in a new Moorish style characterised by luxury and decadence. Ornate ivory carving in particular thrived under the Umayyads, with many examples of beautiful ivory objects preserved from the period. One of these is the Pyxis of al-Mughira: a small, ornate cylindrical box that is part of the collection of the Louvre Museum in Paris.

Ivory boxes like this, known as pyxides, were commonly made for the royal family in Al-Andalus as opulent containers within which could be kept valuable jewellery, fragrances and cosmetics. Later in Al-Andalus' history, they were also given by the caliphs as diplomatic gifts to foreigners. The Pyxis of al-Mughira is arguably the most notable surviving example of such an object due to its magnificent craftsmanship, unusual decoration and informative inscription.

It's thought to have been made in 968 in the workshops of Madinat al-Zahra, a city located near modern-day Cordoba, and is believed to have been commissioned as a gift for Al-Mughira, the son of the caliph Abd al-Rahman III. The Arabic inscription on the lid indicates the intended recipient of the gift, mentioning Al-Mughira by name. Likely created from the cross-section of an elephant's ivory tusk, the pyxis' intricate decorations include four scenes on the outside.

One depicts two lions upon two bulls, while another shows men on horseback around a date palm, a tree that was a recurring motif in Umayyad art. A third scene consists of three figures holding what look like musical instruments, leading to it being referred to as the music scene, or alternatively the enthronement scene. The final image shows two figures collecting eggs from a falcon's nest. The falcon had long been associated with the founder of the Umayyad dynasty, Abd al-Rahman I. The royal symbols and iconography used throughout the design of the Pyxis of al-Maghira continue to be at the centre of debate between historians and archaeologists as they attempt to determine the significance of the scenes.



DEDICATED INSCRIPTION

The Arabic inscription around the top of the pyxis reads: "God's blessing, favours, joy, beatitude to al-Mughira son of the Commander of the faithful, may God have mercy upon him; made in the year 357 [968 CE]."

ADDED HINGES

It's known that the metal mount on the Pyxis of al-Mughira was added to the box after its initial creation as it obstructs some of the delicately carved inscription. The hinge has caused problems with understanding in which order the inscription and scenes are meant to be read.

SUMMER ANIMALS

Aside from the four main scenes, there are a number of other decorations carved into the ivory. Many of these are animals associated by the Umayyads with the summer months, including peacocks, deer and goats.

POWERFUL LIONS

The lions have been interpreted as a representation of Umayyad triumph. They dig their claws and teeth into the bulls to symbolise strength and power.

© Alamy

Hall of Fame

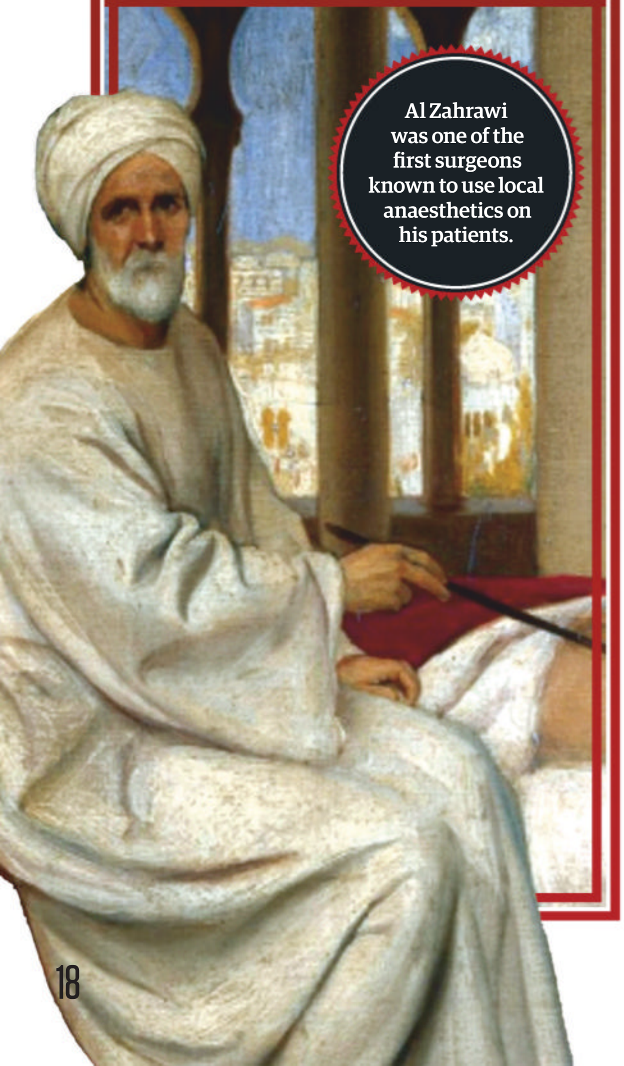
INTELLECTUALS OF AL-ANDALUS

Meet some of the most revered and accomplished Andalusian academics, artists and thinkers

Al Zahrawi

Surgeon, 936 – 1013

An innovative and eminent surgeon, Abu Qasim Khalaf Ibn Abbas Al Zahrawi, more commonly known as Al Zahrawi, was born in the city of Cordoba. For most of his adult life he worked as a physician in his hometown and for a time at the court of the Umayyad caliph Al Hakam III. In the year 1000, he completed writing the *Kitab Al-Tasrif*, a medical encyclopaedia consisting of 30 volumes that covered a number of medical topics, including the first known description of haemophilia as a genetic condition. Al Zahrawi is also credited as the first surgeon to carry out a thyroidectomy.

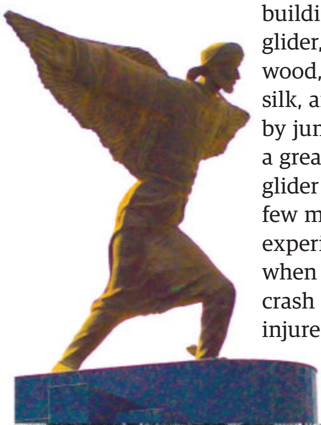


Al Zahrawi was one of the first surgeons known to use local anaesthetics on his patients.

ABBAS IBN FIRNAS

POLYMATH, 810 – 887

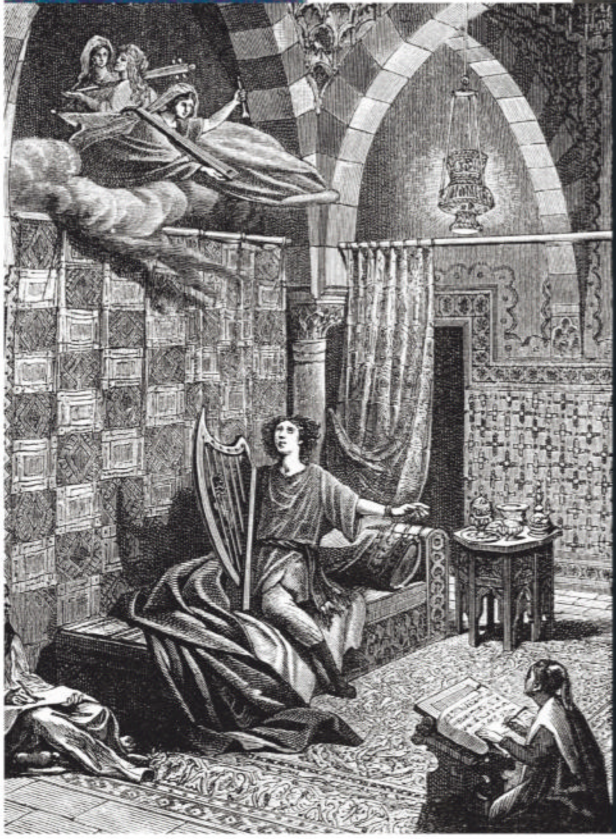
An inventor, astronomer, engineer and mathematician, Abbas Ibn Firnas was born in the Caliphate of Cordoba. Some of his notable inventions included corrective lenses, used to help enhance vision, and a water clock. He is most famous for building the first glider, made of wood, feathers and silk, and testing it by jumping from a great height. The glider worked for a few minutes, but the experiment ended when Ibn Firnas crash landed and injured his back.



IBN HAZM

POLYMATH, 994 – 1064

Born to a prominent family in Cordoba, Ibn Hazm was given an exceptional education and grew up to become a scholar of history, logic, ethics, theology and philosophy as well as an expert on Islamic jurisprudence. During his lifetime, it's thought that he produced over 80,000 pages of work. One of his most famous texts, and a great work of Al-Andalusian literature, is *Ring of the Dove*, a treatise on love.

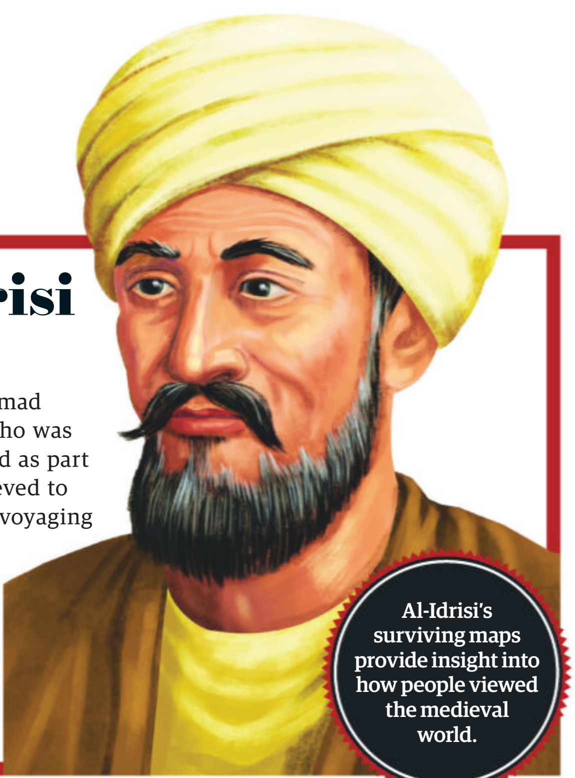


Ziryab

Musician

c.789 – c.857

It's believed that Abu al-Hasan 'Ali ibn Nafi' was born in Baghdad under the rule of the Abbasid Caliphate. He was a talented musician and singer and gained the nickname Ziryab, meaning 'Blackbird', due to his pleasing voice, sweet nature and also because of his dark complexion - historians continue to debate about whether Ziryab's ethnic origins were African, Persian or Kurdish. In 822, Ziryab was invited to the royal Umayyad court of Al-Andalus to become the official court musician. He thrived in Al-Andalus, founding a music school, developing his own musical style and influencing fashion trends.

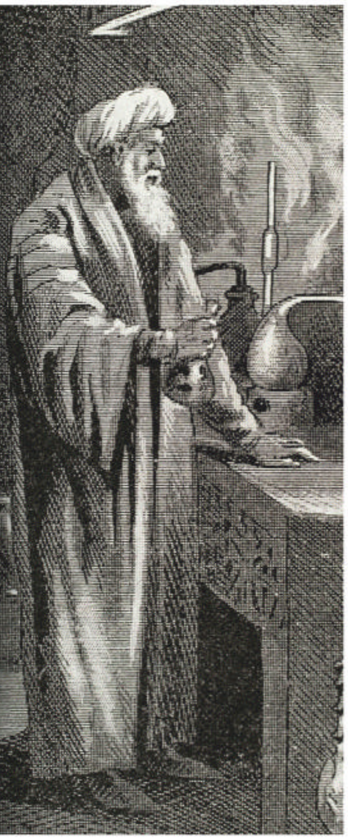


Muhammad al-Idrisi

Cartographer, 1100-65

Little is known for certain about the life of Muhammad al-Idrisi, a medieval cartographer and geographer who was born in Ceuta, Morocco, which at the time was ruled as part of Al-Andalus by the Almoravid dynasty. He is believed to have studied in Cordoba and been a keen traveller, voyaging across the Mediterranean, North Africa and even Asia Minor. In around 1145, al-Idrisi entered the employ of Roger II of Sicily, where he was commissioned to create a world map. Under Sicilian patronage, al-Idrisi also authored a book of 70 maps, which he titled *The Excursion of One Eager to Penetrate the Distant Horizons*.

Al-Idrisi's surviving maps provide insight into how people viewed the medieval world.

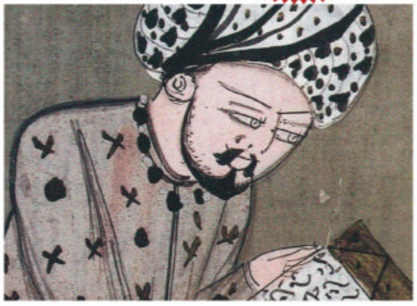


Ibn Zuhr

Physician

1094 – 1162

Sometimes recognised by his Latinised name Avenzoar, Abu Marwan Abdul Malik ibn Abu al-Ala' Zuhr (or Ibn Zuhr) was a physician and surgeon from Seville. Ibn Zuhr came from a family of surgeons and was heralded as the brightest and most skilled of them all. He dedicated his life to the study and practice of medicine, authoring several works that accurately described a number of illnesses and conditions, including different kinds of cancer, and outlined effective treatments. Ibn Zuhr was also notable for carrying out surgical experiments on animals to see if these surgeries would be effective in treating humans.



IBN ARABI

PHILOSOPHER, 1165 – 1240

A philosopher and Sufi mystic, Ibn Arabi was born in Murcia in Al-Andalus and was of Arab descent. He was a student of many spiritual tutors and travelled extensively to further his spiritual enlightenment. Ibn Arabi's most famous work is *Futūhāt al-Makkīyah*, an opus of 560 chapters that discusses the esoteric sciences of Islam. As a spiritual thinker and leader, he became famous throughout the Islamic world. He died in Damascus, Syria.

IBN QUZMAN

POET, 1078 – 1160

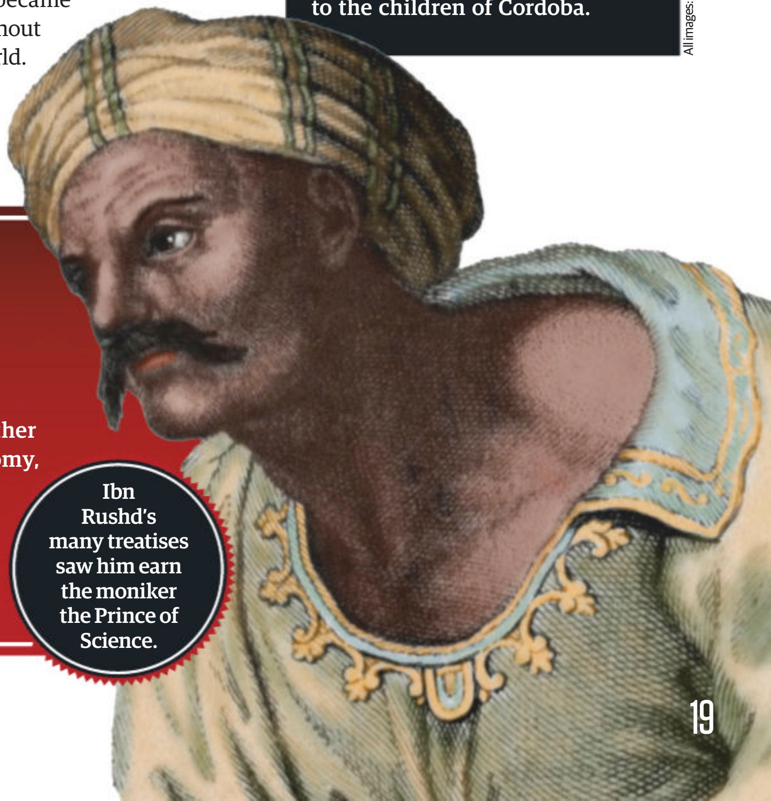
Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Isa Abd al-Malik ibn Isa ibn Quzman al-Zuhri, known as Ibn Quzman, is the most famous poet in Al-Andalus' history and is thought to have written around 300 works, though only half of them survive. The poems of Ibn Quzman, known as zajal, were written in colloquial Al-Andalusian dialect. Despite his fame, little is known about his life, with some historians suggesting that he may have had Gothic, rather than Muslim, genealogical roots.

LUBNA OF CORDOBA

SCHOLAR, C.10TH CENTURY

Lubna of Cordoba was born enslaved and brought up by her mother in the harem of the Madīnat al-Zahrā palace in Cordoba. Lubna became known for her excellence in poetry and grammar, and was freed from slavery to become a secretary and scribe at the palace. She travelled to Cairo, Damascus and Baghdad to acquire manuscripts for the royal library and established a school where she taught mathematics and philosophy to the children of Cordoba.

All images: © Alamy, © Getty Images



Ibn Rushd

Polymath, 1126-98

Ibn Rushd, whose name is sometimes Latinised to Averroes, was a prominent 12th century polymath born in Cordoba. Primarily remembered for his contributions to the field of philosophy, he believed that philosophical thought could play an important role in religion. He was a great admirer of Aristotle and considered him the father of philosophy, reviving Western interest in his work. Ibn Rushd also wrote prolifically on other subjects such as medicine, astronomy, law, mathematics, linguistics, physics and geography. He also worked as a physician to the caliph and as a judge in both Seville and Cordoba.

Ibn Rushd's many treatises saw him earn the moniker the Prince of Science.

THE TASTE OF AL-ANDALUS

Journalist and cookbook author Janet Mendel on how the region's flavours have influenced Spanish cuisine

In your book Flavors of Al-Andalus you include 120 recipes with Moorish heritage. How did you achieve this?

Having written several previous books about Spanish cooking, I have an extensive collection of traditional recipes. I started by pulling recipes from my files whose titles are derived from Arabic, for example albóndigas (meatballs), alboronía (eggplant stew), alfajores (honey-almond rolls) and almojábanas (cheese-filled sweet buns).

I also researched medieval Arabic cookery manuscripts in translation. Two examples are *The Exile's Cookbook, Medieval Gastronomic Treasures from al-Andalus and North Africa* by Ibn Razīn al-Tujībī, translated by Professor Daniel L Newman, and *Smorgasbords of Andalusi and Maghribi Dishes and Their Salutary Benefits* (*Anwā ‘al-Saydala fī Alwān al-At‘ima*), an anonymous 13th century cookbook translated and edited by Nawal Nasrallah. I searched for recipes that closely resemble dishes that are still prepared in today's kitchens.

Finally, I selected recipes that communities themselves identify as 'Andalusí' or that are traditional in towns that historically have a Muslim history. Sometimes this entailed modifications, for example, deleting tomatoes, potatoes or pimentón (paprika). These are ingredients from the New World, unknown in medieval Spain, that have been added to historical dishes in subsequent centuries. I swapped lamb or beef, the prevalent meats in Moorish times, in recipes where today's cooks would use pork.

LEFT Islamic rule introduced saffron production to Spain, a key ingredient in paella

Headshot: © Nina Reistad

Mendel has lived in Spain for over four decades and has written extensively on Spanish cooking. Her other books include *Cooking from the Heart of Spain: Food of La Mancha* and *Tapas: A Bite of Spain*. She also blogs about food at her site *My Kitchen in Spain*

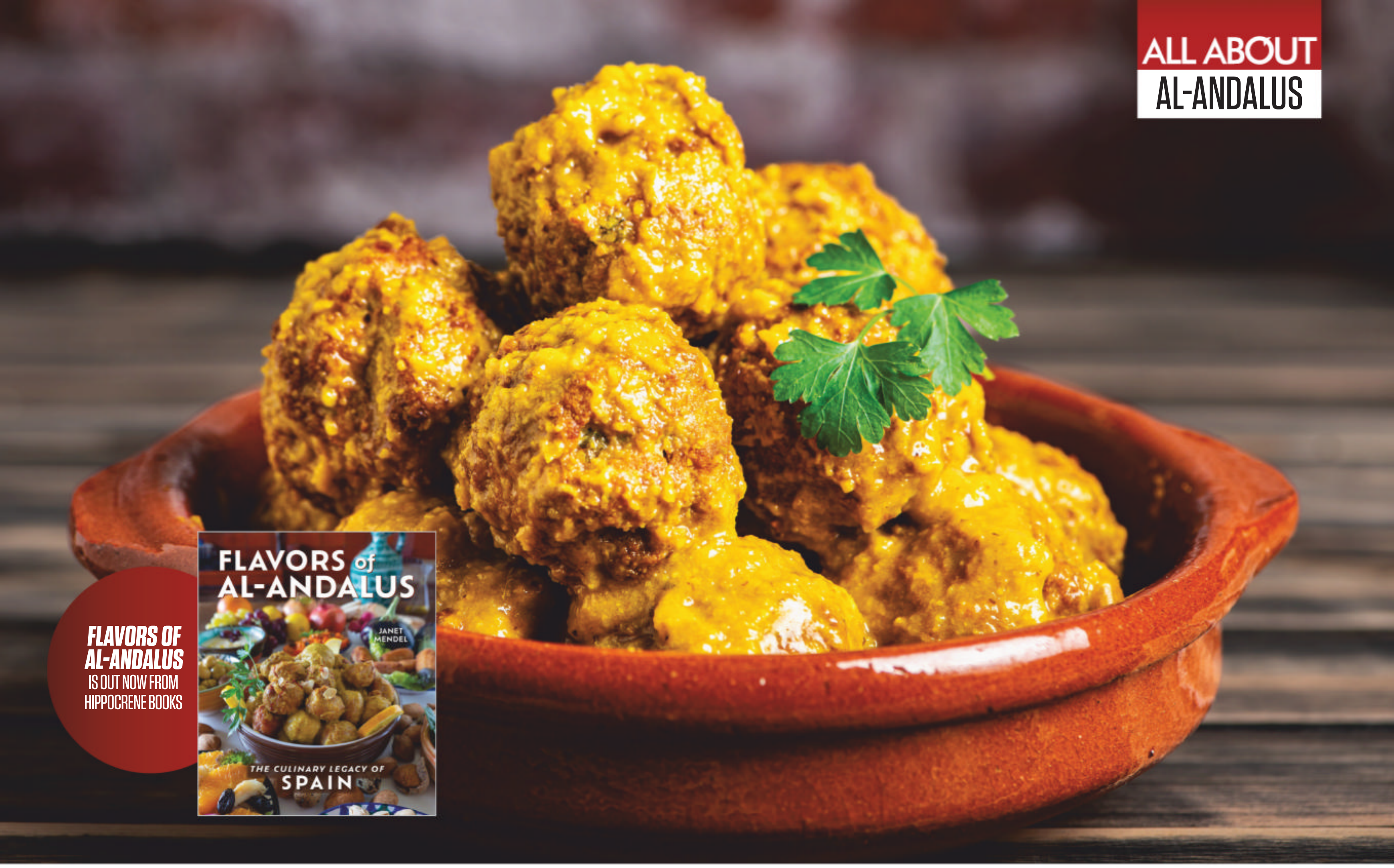
In which areas is the culinary legacy of Moorish Spain most evident and how can it be seen?

The culinary legacy of Al-Andalus is most evident in the eight provinces of present-day Andalucía - Sevilla, Córdoba, Jaén, Granada, Almería, Málaga, Cádiz and Huelva - because that's where the Muslim kingdoms persisted the longest, almost eight centuries. Walk into a tapas bar in Sevilla and you can taste a dish - spinach with chickpeas - that is hardly changed from when the lingua franca was Arabic. But the heritage is evident anywhere in Spain where there was a Moorish presence. Examples are the marzipan of Toledo, the rice dishes of València and the turrón - almond nougat of Alicante.

The flavours of Al-Andalus can also be found today in communities of Sephardic Jews in Turkey, Morocco and the Americas. Before the Christian Reconquest of Iberia and the expulsion of the Jews, Sephardic communities existed alongside the Muslims in Al-Andalus, sharing language, culture and foodways. They took their favourite recipes with them into the diaspora and, as converts to Christianity, into convents where, to this day, nuns prepare confections and pastries hardly changed from the time of Al-Andalus.

What were some innovations (in terms of ingredients, spices and techniques) that were brought to Spain during the Moorish rule?

The Arab colonisers were famed as gardeners and horticulturists. Some crops were introduced by the Arabs, others were improved with advanced techniques



FLAVORS OF AL-ANDALUS IS OUT NOW FROM HIPPOCRENE BOOKS

ABOVE Meatballs in an almond sauce are one example of a Spanish recipe that can be traced to the Al-Andalusian period

All images: © Alamy, © Shutterstock

> *"The Inquisition snitches could sniff out an errant stewpot by the smell of olive oil"*

of cultivation, irrigation and propagation. Durum wheat was an innovation that led to leavened bread, pasta and couscous, where before there was only flour gruel. Although saffron existed in earlier Roman times, the Arabs popularised its use as early as the 9th century. Saffron of La Mancha to this day is an esteemed product, used in many popular dishes such as paella.

Many new vegetables and fruits came from the Muslims. A 9th century 'influencer' named Ziryab popularised asparagus dishes at the caliphal court in Córdoba. But it was aubergines that became the signature vegetable of both Muslim and Sephardic communities of Al-Andalus. One of the 13th century cookbooks lists dozens of ways to prepare them, most of which have come down to present times.

Although olives were grown in the Iberian Peninsula long before Moorish times, the Muslims greatly extended the plantations and production of oil. Almonds were another legacy, an important ingredient in both sweet and savoury foods today in Spanish cuisine. The Arabs also introduced sugarcane to Iberia and the method for extracting the cane juice and producing sugar. Although largely displaced by resorts, sugar cane still grows on the Malaga and Granada coasts.

What do you think is the greatest legacy of Moorish Spain on Spanish cuisine?

Cooking in olive oil may be one of the greatest legacies of Muslim culture in Spain and one which distinguishes the cooking from other European cuisines. Because Muslims did not use pig fat, cooking in oil was prevalent in medieval Iberia. Even sweets were confected with olive oil. An example is the mantecado, a small crumbly biscuit made with lard ('manteca' is the word for lard) that is a popular Christmas sweet in Spain today. Mantecados were originally made in Moorish times with olive oil, not lard. Frying in olive oil is part of the legacy. An example is buñuelos (fritters) sold in the souks of Al-Andalus that in present times are sold at stalls at village ferias and are special for saints' day festivities.

Following the Reconquest and the establishment of the Inquisition, systematic suppression of Islamic and Sephardic culture and foodways took place as a way to consolidate the power of the Catholic monarchs of the newly unified Spanish kingdom. Lard emerged as the principal fat for cooking and for pastry confection. The Inquisition snitches could sniff out an errant stewpot by the smell of olive oil. In subsequent centuries olive oil was relegated to the poorest households. In the last century extra virgin olive oil from Spain has made a comeback in popular cuisine. Growers have improved harvest and processing methods, producing superb oil in this day and age.

Do you have a favourite dish that has Moorish heritage?

My favourite dish with roots in Al-Andalus is probably albóndigas en salsa de almendras, meatballs in a savoury almond-saffron sauce. I even put a photo of meatballs on the book cover! It meets all the criteria – a name from the Arabic (al bunduq, 'hazelnut', for the small round shape), the very Moorish spicing, almonds to thicken the sauce and a recipe that is remarkably similar to one in the 13th century Arabic manuscript. Only, of course, in Moorish times the meatballs were made with minced chicken, lamb or veal and nowadays they are usually made with ground pork meat. The saffron-inflected almond sauce, sometimes called pepitoria, is also used in chicken, fish and vegetable dishes.

AL-ANDALUS MOSQUES

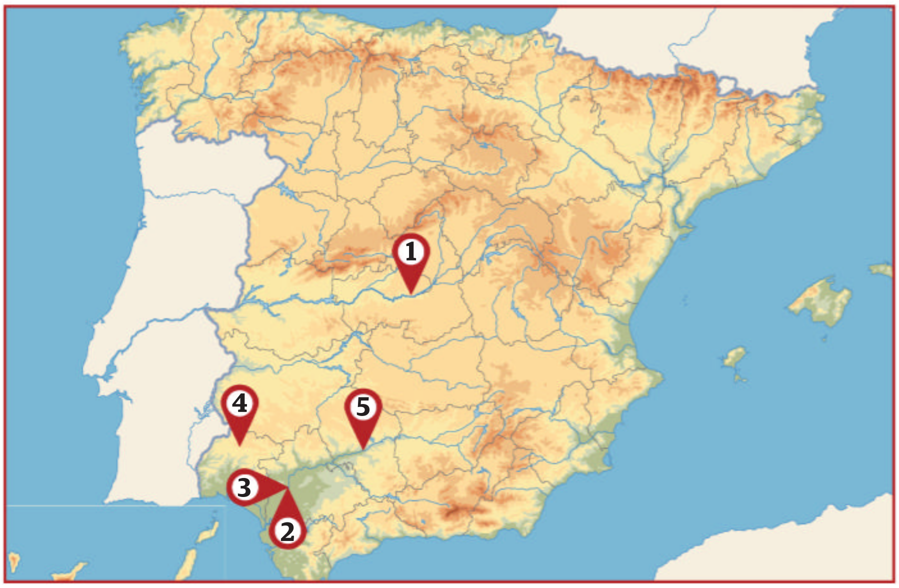
Hundreds could once be found across the peninsula, but now only a few remain

1 MOSQUE OF CRISTO DE LA LUZ

TOLEDO

During the Islamic reign, there were ten mosques in Toledo. In the years following the Reconquista, nine were either destroyed or transformed into Christian churches. Today, the Mosque of Cristo De La Luz is the only example that has not undergone significant changes, allowing visitors to appreciate the original structure's beauty. Built in 999 by Musa Ibn Ali, the surrounding area was at that time populated by particularly affluent Islamic citizens.

There is an interesting legend attached to the mosque concerning King Alfonso VI, which gives it its current name - Christ of the Light. Alfonso is said to have discovered a figurine of Christ hidden within one of the walls, where it had been placed centuries prior to protect it from desecration. Alfonso was led to this discovery by the light of a candle (or oil lamp) that had burnt continuously throughout those years. When riding towards the mosque, Alfonso's horse is also said to have instinctively kneeled.

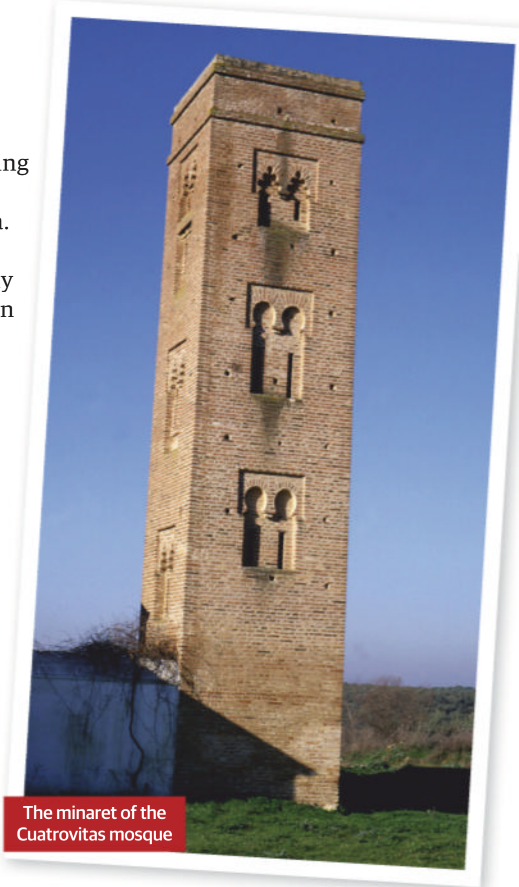


2 MOSQUE OF CUATROVITAS

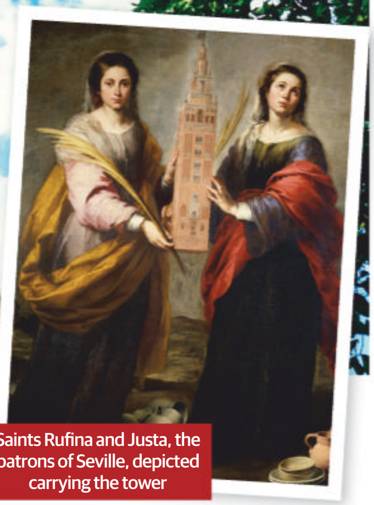
SEVILLE

The Mosque of Cuatrovitas was once part of an important settlement from which it takes its name. This medieval settlement experienced its heyday during the 12th and 13th centuries, before being abandoned after the Reconquista. The mosque was not only used by the population of Cuatrovitas but also likely served a number of other settlements in the surrounding area.

Some of the mosque's structure survives in the church that was constructed from its ruins and that has been altered and added to throughout the centuries, including into the 20th century. Of particular interest is the mosque's square brick minaret, which has some structural similarities to La Giralda in Seville (although it's not quite as large or as impressive). Nonetheless, it is considered historically important and a fine example of 12th century Islamic architecture still surviving in Spain. It's known today as the Ermita de Cuatrovitas (Shrine of Cuatrovitas).



The minaret of the Cuatrovitas mosque



Saints Rufina and Justa, the patrons of Seville, depicted carrying the tower

3 LA GIRALDA

SEVILLE

The centre of Seville is dominated by an imposing Gothic belltower known as La Giralda, part of Seville's cathedral. The tower originally served as the minaret for the Great Mosque of Seville, which was destroyed following the Reconquista. Although La Giralda was modified throughout the subsequent centuries, with Gothic additions added by Hernan Ruiz the Younger during the Renaissance, it remains one of the most fabulous examples of Almohad architecture.

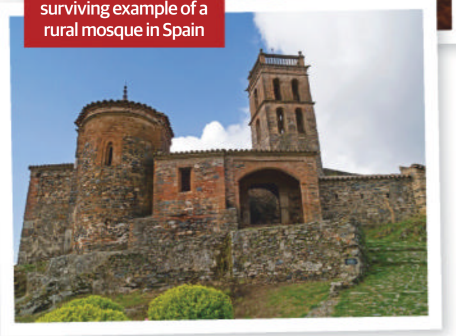
Construction began on La Giralda in 1184 under the supervision of lead engineer Gever. One of its unique features is the absence of stairs; instead, the interior has a series of 35 ramps. This unusual design allowed visitors on horseback to reach the top of the tower without needing to dismount. The tower takes its name from the Spanish word for weather vane, originating from the large weather vane at the top of the tower.

The design of La Giralda influenced the construction of similar towers not only in Spain but also throughout the Americas during the 16th century. Alongside the Alcazar royal palace, another fabulous example of Al-Andalusian architecture in Seville, La Giralda is one of Seville's most popular tourist attractions. Thousands visit each year to tackle the long climb up the tower's famous ramps, to be rewarded by the spectacular view of the city from the top.

4 ALMONASTER LA REAL MOSQUE

ALMONASTER LA REAL

Almonaster is the best surviving example of a rural mosque in Spain



A particularly striking example of an Al-Andalusian mosque can be found in Almonaster, the only surviving example of a rural mosque in the Iberian Peninsula. It was built during the 9th and 10th centuries during the reign of Abd al-Rahman III. The mosque was constructed on the ruins of a 6th century Visigoth basilica, from which building materials were sourced. The shape of the mosque is considered to be unusual and was likely constructed this way due to its location on a hillside.

As with the other sites here, the Almonaster Mosque was also converted into a Catholic place of worship following the Reconquista, with later additions to the building occurring during the 18th century. However, these alterations weren't as extensive as in other examples and today the mosque is incredibly well preserved. Much of the original Islamic architecture remains and even some of the original Visigoth and Roman elements can still be seen.

5 GREAT MOSQUE OF CORDOBA

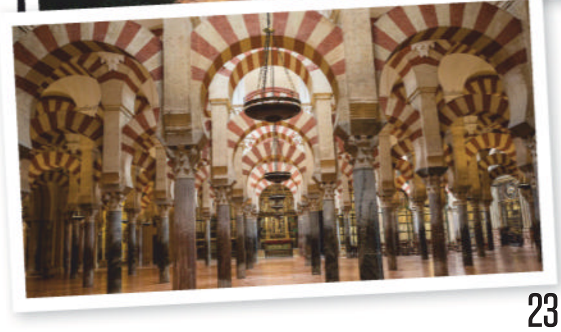
CORDOBA

The Great Mosque of Cordoba is one of the largest and most impressive examples of Islamic architecture still standing in Spain. Constructed in 785 by Abd al-Rahman I, it was originally a much smaller structure than today's enormous building, with various additions and expansions occurring throughout the years.

One of the most celebrated features of the Great Mosque is the series of columns that can be found inside. There are approximately 1,250 of them, all made from different materials. This difference in building materials can be explained by the fact that the columns were not specifically created for the mosque, but were in fact taken from other buildings and adapted for their use here.

Following the Reconquista, the building was claimed by King Ferdinand III as a Catholic cathedral. However, it took some time for any remodelling to occur – in the mid-16th century a nave in the Gothic style was added to the centre of the building. In more recent years, restorations have begun to restore some of the original Islamic features, such as a 19th century project seeking to preserve the building's ornate Islamic glass mosaics.

On 8 August 2025, a serious fire broke out at the mosque-cathedral. Although the blaze was eventually contained, it caused serious damage and emergency restoration work is now taking place to repair the effected areas.



All images: © Alamy, © Getty Images

ALL ABOUT HISTORY
BRITAIN AND GUNS
From the Maxim gun to the Lee-Enfield
THUNDERBIRDS ARE 60
Gerry Anderson's puppet revolution
GREAT POWER COUPLES
Partnerships that changed history
'BUTCHERY' AT THE BATTLE OF FREDERICKSBURG
INCREDIBLE ANCIENT EGYPTIAN CRAFTS
AT HOME WITH THE DUTCH MASTERS
THE FIRST CHINESE EMPIRE
How the Qin forged a great power from the fragments of the Warring States
FROM BYZANTIUM TO ISTANBUL
WHAT IF FRANCO JOINED THE AXIS?
WHAT IF D-DAY FAILED?
NORSE
THE BLACK DEATH
From miasma to miracles: how medieval medicine desperately battled the bubonic plague
ANCIENT SPORTS
ANCIENT GHOSTS
MARIE LAVEAU
The Voodoo Queen
New Orleans' most famous daughter reigned over the city for decades, with both rich and poor seeking her mystic counsel
MAKING A MONSTER
THE CREATION OF THE FRANKENSTEIN LEGEND
Piecing together the inspirations and evolution of Mary Shelley's famous monster

REASONS TO SUBSCRIBE...

NEW! Digital access to 80+ issues when you subscribe to print**

Delivered direct to your door or device

Never miss an issue

***Terms and conditions:** Offer closes 31st December 2025. Price is guaranteed for 6 months, please allow up to 6 weeks for the delivery of your first subscription issue (up to 8 weeks overseas). The full subscription rate is for 6 months and includes postage and packaging. Pay £20.55 for 6 months, *saving 45% on the print cover price. Payment is non-refundable after the 14-day cancellation period. **Access to the digital library will end with your subscription. For full terms and conditions, visit www.magazinesdirect.com/terms. For enquiries and overseas rates please email help@magazinesdirect.com. For new orders and customer service queries email help@mymagazine.co.uk

SUBSCRIBE TODAY & SAVE 45%!*

PRINT & DIGITAL £20.55

+NEW DIGITAL ACCESS**

DIGITAL ONLY £16.44

EVERY 6 MONTHS

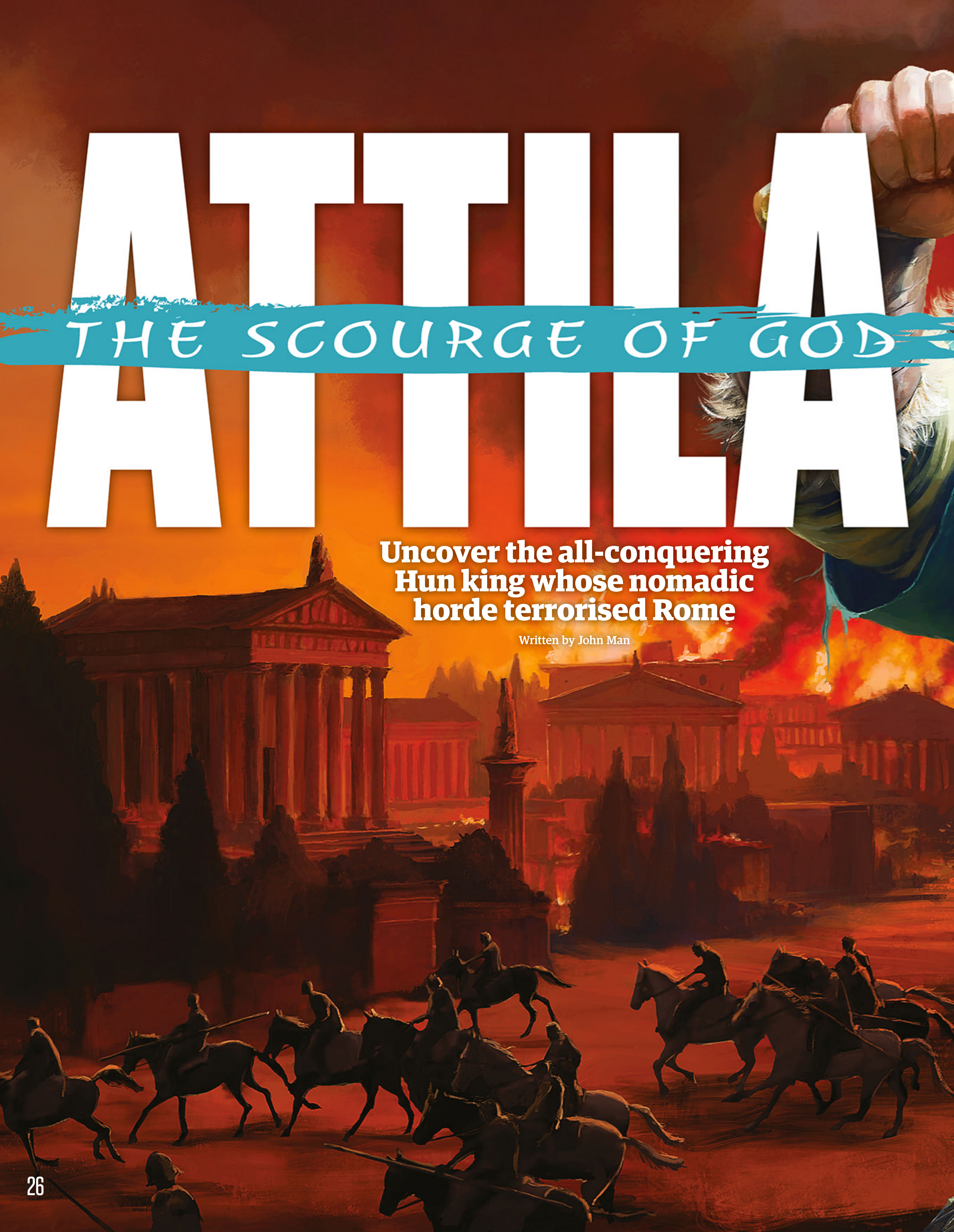
ALL ABOUT HISTORY
THE REAL FRANKENSTEIN
Science and technology that inspired Shelley
THE SCOURGE OF GOD
ATTILA
Uncover the all-conquering Hun king whose nomadic horde terrorised Rome
VOODOO QUEEN
Why Marie Laveau is New Orleans folk hero
THE LADY POPE
How one woman gained power in the Vatican
JUNGLE COMMANDOS
Why it was Burma or bust for Britain in WWII
PLUS
HISTORY OF MUSLIM SPAIN
THE INCA EARTHSHAKER
WHAT IF AMERICA STAYED OUT OF WWI?
DARK LONDON

ALL ABOUT HISTORY

FIND YOUR SUBSCRIPTION AT
www.magazinesdirect.com/AAH/DH43U
EMAIL HELP@MAGAZINESDIRECT.COM AND QUOTE DH43U

ATTILA

THE SCOURGE OF GOD



Uncover the all-conquering Hun king whose nomadic horde terrorised Rome

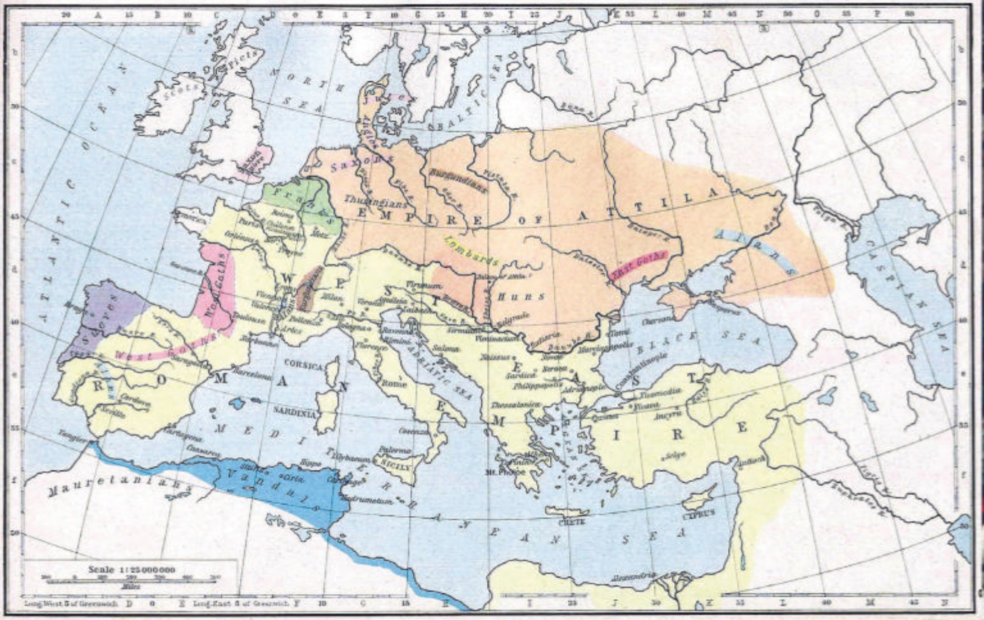
Written by John Man

EXPERT BIO

JOHN MAN

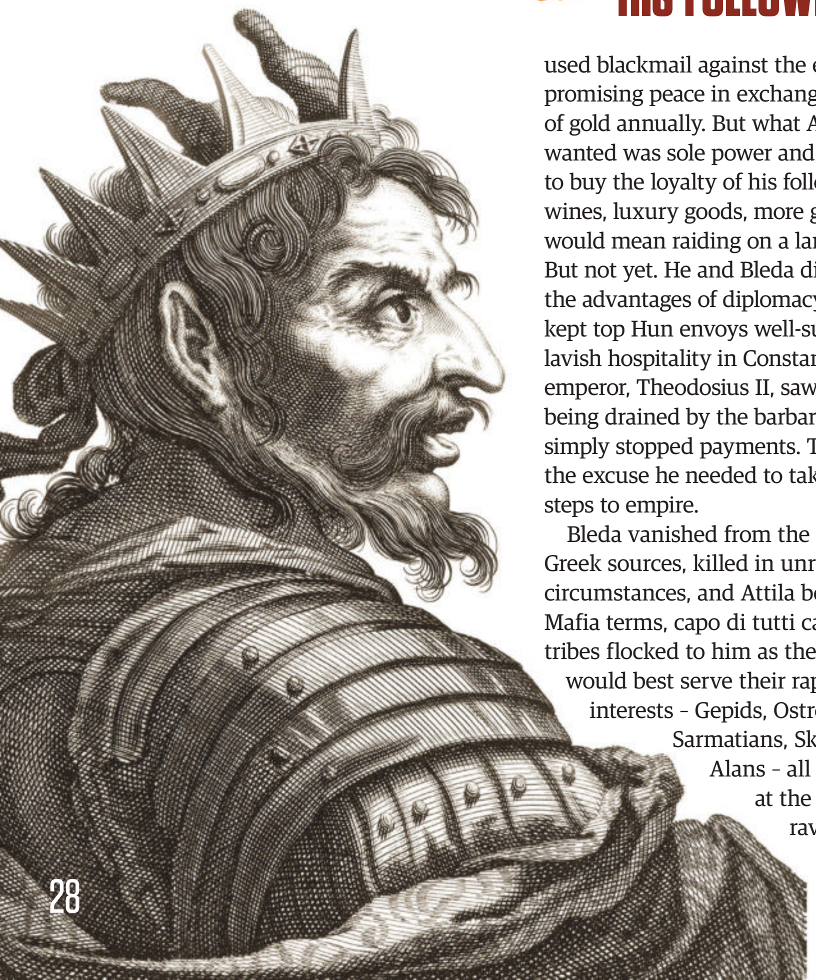
Man is an historian and travel writer, with a focus on Central Asia and Mongolia in particular. His many books include *The Terracotta Army* (2007), *The Mongol Empire* (2014), *Saladin* (2015) and *Attila: The Barbarian King Who Challenged Rome* (2005).

Illustration by: Rocío Espín Piñar



The Scourge of God: this nickname has fitted Attila well since it was first used in 451 CE. By then, his Huns had despoiled a large part of Christian Europe, were apparently on their way to take the Roman province of Gaul and – if his plans worked out – would seize the heart of the empire itself. Yet when he died two years later, his own realm vanished with hardly a trace, leaving a metaphor of evil in the European imagination. But there was much more to Attila than that.

No one knows the origins of the Huns. They may have been remnants of the Xiongnu people, who formed the first of several nomadic empires that ruled the steppes north of the Great Wall for almost three centuries, from 209 BCE to 89 CE, when a Chinese army scattered them across Inner Asia. If they ever had an imperial past, they forgot it and reverted to a life as impoverished migrant herders, formidable mounted archers living in wagons and tents. By the late 4th century, they had arrived in today's Hungary (no connection with the Huns, by the way), one of the many 'barbarian' tribes on the eastern fringes of the Roman Empire. Christian historians recorded their raids. In 395 CE they galloped 2,500km around the Black Sea, down into the Holy Land, pillaging and plundering. "Behold the wolves of the North," cried St Jerome in Bethlehem. "Dead are the merchants, widowed the women," mourned a Syrian priest, Cyrillonas.



Attila came to power in about 435 CE, sharing rule with his brother Bleda. They set about acquiring more of what his people lacked: wealth. The target now was European Christendom, divided between Catholic Rome and Orthodox Constantinople. At first, the brothers used blackmail against the eastern half, promising peace in exchange for 320kg of gold annually. But what Attila really wanted was sole power and vast wealth to buy the loyalty of his followers – silks, wines, luxury goods, more gold – which would mean raiding on a large scale. But not yet. He and Bleda discovered the advantages of diplomacy, which kept top Hun envoys well-supplied with lavish hospitality in Constantinople. The emperor, Theodosius II, saw his wealth being drained by the barbarians and simply stopped payments. This gave Attila the excuse he needed to take the first steps to empire.

"ATTILA WANTED SOLE POWER AND VAST WEALTH TO BUY THE LOYALTY OF HIS FOLLOWERS"

Bleda vanished from the Latin and Greek sources, killed in unrecorded circumstances, and Attila became, in Mafia terms, capo di tutti capi. Many tribes flocked to him as the leader who would best serve their rapacious interests – Gepids, Ostrogoths, Sarmatians, Skirians, Alans – all eager to tear at the flanks of a ravaged empire.

Suddenly, with little need for violence, Attila's realm stretched from Hungary to the Baltic and the Caspian. The Huns and their allies made a formidable force, not only of cavalry but also infantry and wagons and siege engines adopted from the Romans, all ready to pillage their way to Constantinople.

The 'New Rome', as it was commonly known, was impregnable from the north, its narrow approaches guarded by Theodosius' new defences – a 20-metre moat, a 10-metre outer wall topped by a parapet manned by archers, and a 20-metre inner wall. Even today, they would make a modern army pause. An assault would be suicidal. But along the way – almost 1,000km, mostly hilly – there were other cities well worth taking.

One was Naissus (today's Niš, in Serbia, on the River Nišava). The assault was described by the Greek official Priscus (more on him later), who talks of siege towers and pointed battering rams slung on chains, protected by woven willow and leather armour. Naissus fought back with boulders that crushed a battering ram like a sledgehammer on a tortoise, but the boulders ran out and the city fell. Two years later, as Priscus recorded, the bones of the dead still littered the bank of the Nišava.

Theodosius sued for peace and agreed terms: captives ransomed and the annual tribute in gold tripled to the equivalent of 950kg, a river of gold to impoverished 'barbarians'. Scholars estimate that this would have given Attila some two percent of the eastern empire's annual income – if Theodosius paid up.

ATTILA IN PERSON

How did Attila manage it? We have the answer from Priscus, the only person to have met Attila and written about him. A bookish 35-year-old, Priscus had a fiction writer's flair for a good story, which he told in his eight-volume *Byzantine*

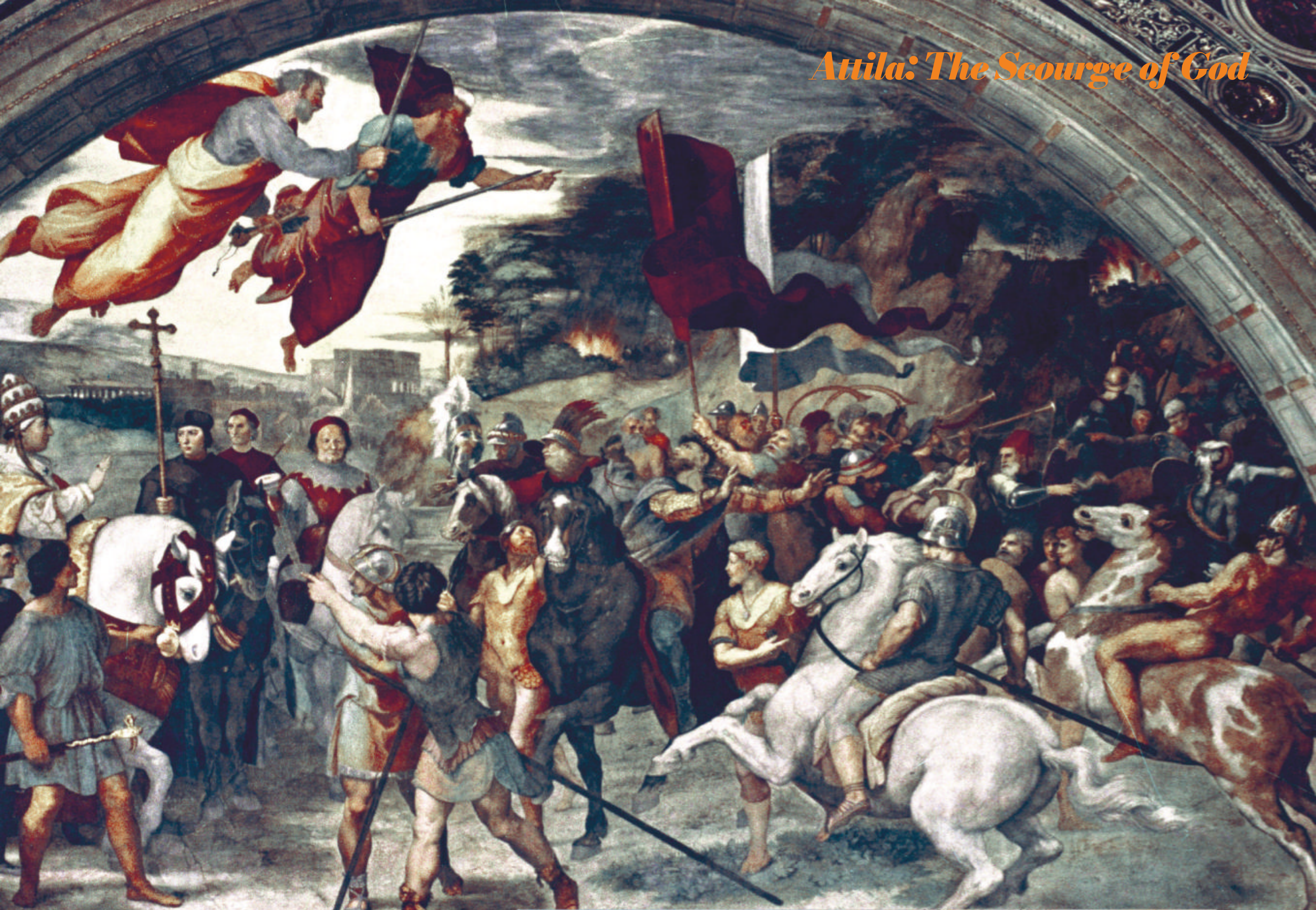
ABOVE-LEFT Attila's empire reached its greatest extent between 451-453 CE

ABOVE Raphael's 1511 depiction of Pope Leo I confronting Attila in 452 CE

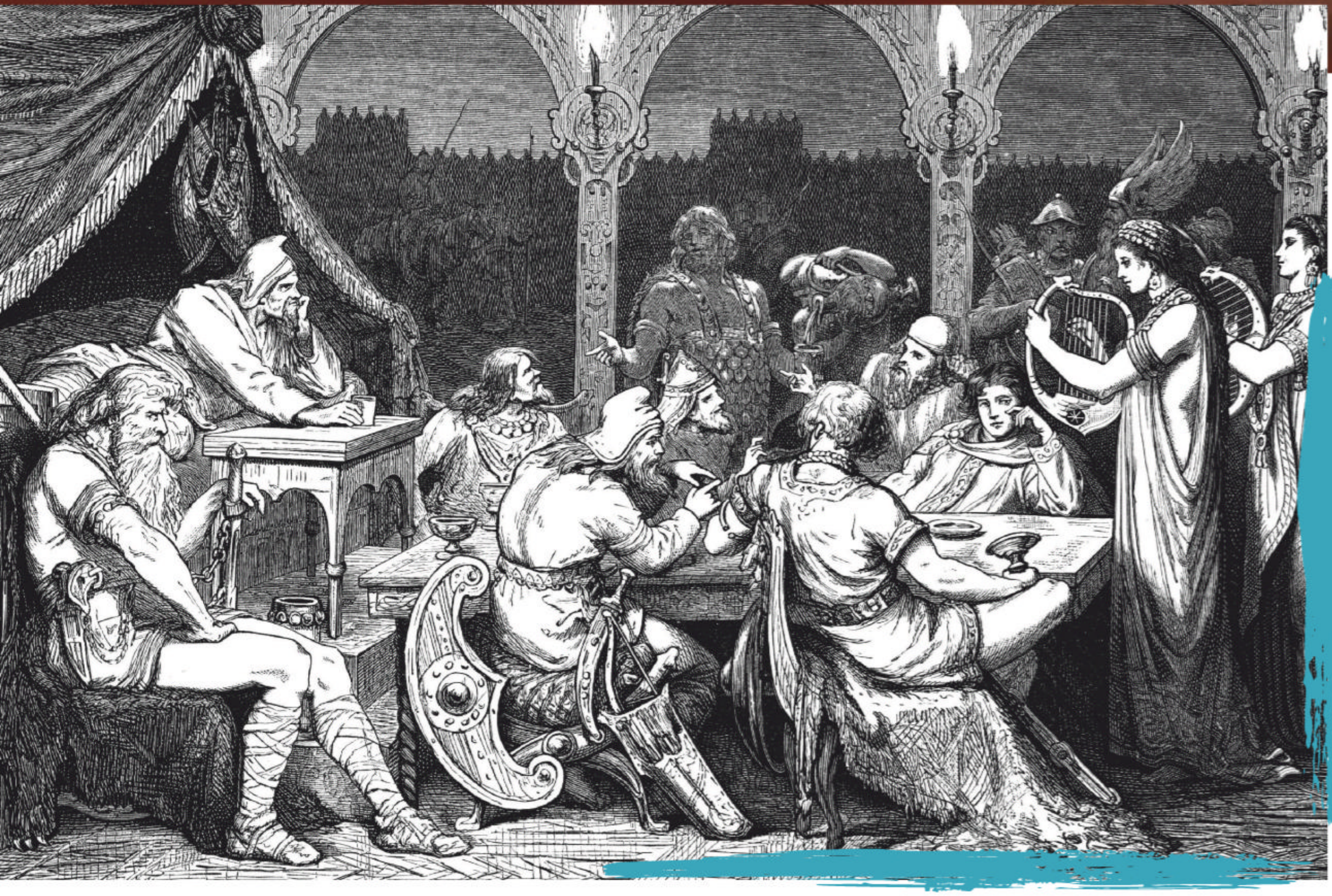
LEFT A 17th century print of Attila by French engraver Jerome David

RIGHT Pope Leo I is said to have persuaded Attila to halt his advance

FAR-RIGHT There is more to Attila than just his reputation for evil and brutality



All images: © Alamy, © Getty Images



BELOW Hun cauldrons like this were probably used in tribal feasts

History (though only bits survive, copied by the 6th-century historian Jordanes). The visit to Attila's capital was ostensibly a peace mission, sent at Attila's request, but it quickly acquired a different and secret agenda. Through an interpreter named Vigilas, the top Greek official – a devious eunuch named Chrysaphius – proposed an astonishing idea to Attila's envoy Edika: that Edika should assassinate Attila and return to Constantinople to a life of unimaginable wealth. Edika agreed.

After much discussion, mainly about the bag of gold that was to pay for the murder, the delegation of eight set off, with their attendants and horses, and Priscus as secretary recording events. Four hard-riding weeks later they were at Attila's wooden-walled capital (its site remains undiscovered).

We actually have two eyewitness accounts of Attila – one by Priscus and another (second-hand) one from a 6th-century historian, Cassiodorus, whose grandfather described to him a visit to Attila's court. The two portray an ugly little man – large head, small eyes, thin beard flecked with grey – moody, unpredictable, suspicious of all, brutal, haughty, supremely self-confident, brilliant at keeping aides and visitors dependent on his every whim. These are the qualities of many autocrats. Yet he was also generous, "excellent in council, sympathetic to supplicants," as Priscus says. The combination made him semi-divine in the eyes of his followers. He was one of the most charismatic and terrifying figures in history.

Priscus describes how Edika, Attila's envoy but now a potential assassin, gets cold feet. He foresees his own death. To prove his newly restored loyalty and save his skin, he reveals the assassination plot to Attila. Vigilas the interpreter, who's carrying the gold supposed to finance the plot, is seized. Attila, in a mock rage, calls him a "worthless beast!" and forces Vigilas to confess the plot – which Attila already knows from Edika. Now he has Theodosius in a vice, guilty of planning regicide, the proof being the confessions and the gold.

This offered Attila a diplomatic and financial coup. He sent a delegation to the emperor with a letter proclaiming his dominance. Who, he asked, was the barbarian, who the more civilised? "As a result," wrote Priscus, Attila demanded the eunuch Chrysaphius for punishment – perhaps a slow and painful death at the hands of Attila's impalers. But to comply would have been political suicide and he only course of action for Theodosius was to pay, and pay, and pay, which was what Attila wanted all along.

As with many other pillagers, however, wealth and security were not enough. Constantinople being impregnable, Attila looked west, to Rome and the European half of Christendom.

TO GAUL – AND BEYOND?

At this point we must meet another major character in Attila's story: Flavius Aetius, who was the son of a Roman general and destined for high office. Soon after 400 CE, young Flavius was sent off to spend time with both the Goths and the Huns. This world, often seen in terms of Roman versus barbarian, was in fact interfused. Romans fought barbarians but they also used them to fight barbarians, and traded, and exchanged ambassadors. For elite Roman and barbarian families, it was common to exchange sons as so-called 'hostages' to learn about each other's ways.

All images: © Alamy, © Getty Images

LEFT Attila was said to be "excellent in council, sympathetic to supplicants"

INSET Gold coins like this minted under Theodosius II flowed by the million into Attila's hands

ABOVE The walls built by Theodosius II in the early 5th century still stand today, though much restored

So as a teenager, Aetius was well-placed to serve as a top-level commander and adviser. He was with the Huns before Attila took over, but they could well have known each other.

In 425 CE, to sort out a brief civil war between Rome and Constantinople, Aetius hired Hun mercenaries, in effect his personal army. Promoted to comes (count), he was sent to protect the Gaulish frontier. These were uncertain times. Rome was an ageing, wounded lion, its flanks mauled by barbarian hyenas. Visigoths dominated Aquitaine; Alans, Franks and Suevians had infiltrated Gaul; Franks were on the River Meuse; North Africa was lost to Vandals; Britain cut off; Brittany isolated. Under Aetius, Huns fought the Franks, Goths and (among others) the Burgundians, whose fate at the hands of the Huns became the basis of the German medieval epic *Nibelungenlied* and more recently part of Wagner's *Ring Cycle*.

> "ROME WAS AN AGEING, WOUNDED LION, ITS FLANKS MAULED BY BARBARIAN HYENAS"

Seven years later Aetius' Huns dispersed back to Hungary, forming the core of the Hunnish army that would eventually fall to Attila. Then for two decades Aetius was Rome's most influential general, three times a consul and responsible for barbarian relations, settling them on Roman soil, stopping them coming, or imposing peace. In 447 CE, he even helped resolve a dispute between Attila and a recalcitrant eastern tribe. In 451 CE, Attila's counterpart was about to play his greatest role as Attila's enemy and nemesis.

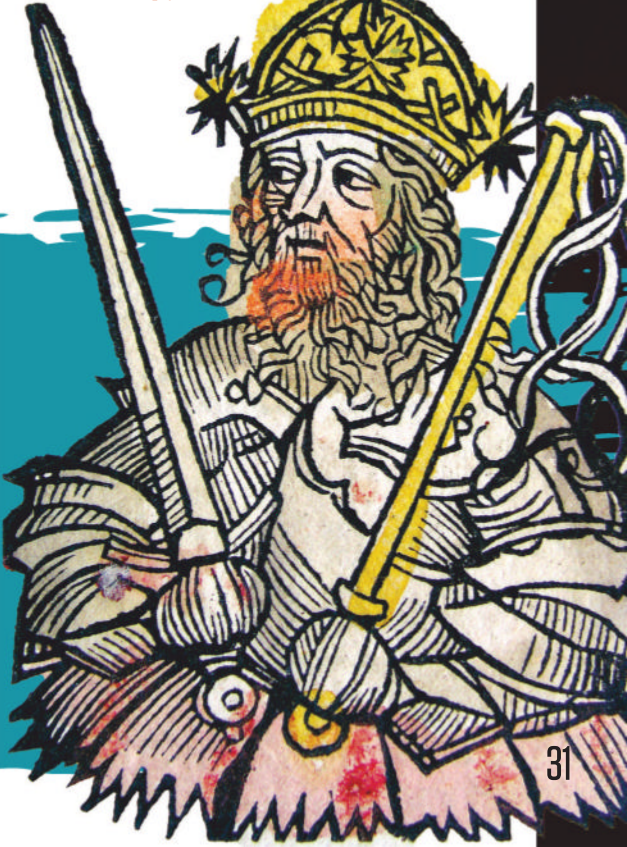
The assault on the empire would be Attila's greatest gamble: to seize Gaul and then the heart of the empire itself. He had a just cause as well, because it happened that Emperor Valentinian III quarrelled with his ambitious sister Honoria. An affair with her chamberlain got her exiled and married off to a husband she loathed. Furious, Honoria planned revenge: she wrote to Attila, offering herself as wife. With a princess would surely come a dowry to match her wealth. Gaul, in his view, would be a suitable down-payment. ▶

ABOVE The Porta Negra guard house in Trier was on Attila's route as he marched west in 451 CE, but it was too formidable to take so he simply went around it

PORTRAYING THE SCOURGE

Can we trust depictions of Attila?

There are thousands of 'portraits' of Attila, but none are genuine. Some are based on the description by Priscus, of an ugly little man with a grey-flecked beard, but most are purely imaginary, reflecting the prejudices of the artist. This one (right) is the first printed so-called portrait. It's from the *Nuremberg Chronicle*, the first universal history – the *Weltchronik* (*World Chronicle*) – by Hartmann Schedel, published in Nuremberg in 1493, just 40 years after the invention of printing with moveable type by Johannes Gutenberg. Few of its hundreds of illustrations are in any way authentic, but this one is true to Schedel's Christian traditions. Its caption reads "Athila der konig ein gaysel gottes" ("Attile der König eine Geissel Gottes" in modern German, meaning "Attila the king, God's scourge"). Since Attila was supposedly doing God's work, he is shown as a Christian knight in full armour, carrying a sceptre, the symbol of kingship, and a sword, the symbol of a Christian warrior. It's one of history's ironies, considering how many Christians he killed and how much of their world he destroyed.



THE MIGRATION PERIOD

The Huns weren't the only group on the move in this era

ANGLES, SAXONS & JUTES

According to the scholar St Bede, Germanic peoples originating in northern Europe migrated to Britannia around the 5th century having been invited to aid in the defence of the islands by Vortigern, king of the Britons.

FRANKS

While the Angles and Saxons moved to Britain, the Franks also originated in Germany but stopped short of crossing the channel, settling instead in what is now France and Belgium in the 5th century and creating their own powerful kingdom.

GOTHS

Gothic historian Jordanes placed the origin of his people as those from southern Scandinavia who crossed the Baltic Sea under King Berig. Pushing out the Vandals, they settled in what is now Germany before moving south again to the Black Sea.

OSTROGOTHS

An offshoot of the Goths following their establishment north of the Black Sea, from the 3rd century the Ostrogoths made their way across the Balkans before establishing a kingdom in Italy in the 5th century.

VISIGOTHS

This group was a further subdivision of the Ostrogoths from the 4th century who eventually found themselves established much further west in Gaul and Spain. They had been pushed out of what is now Romania by the Huns in 376 CE.

HUNS

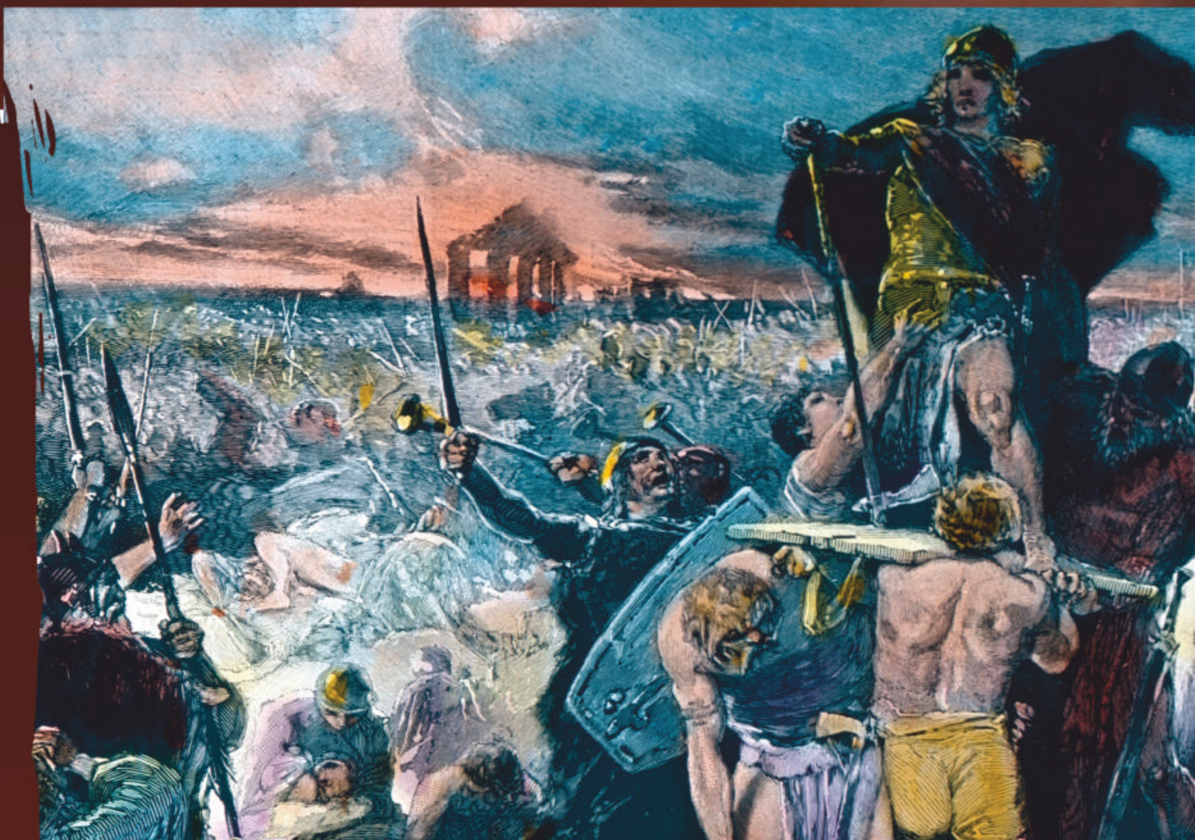
Emerging from across the Volga River, the Huns were feared mounted archers, and while their origins were nomadic, they established a powerful empire in central Europe from 376 CE onwards.

VANDALS

Another Germanic group, the Vandals first headed south before being pushed west by the Huns in the 5th century. They invaded Gaul and the Iberian Peninsula then crossed into North Africa, eventually conquering Carthage.

GAELS

Having been well established in what is now Ireland from an offshoot of the Celtic peoples from central Europe, the Gaels began heading into northern Britain around this period, establishing the Celtic base in this region.

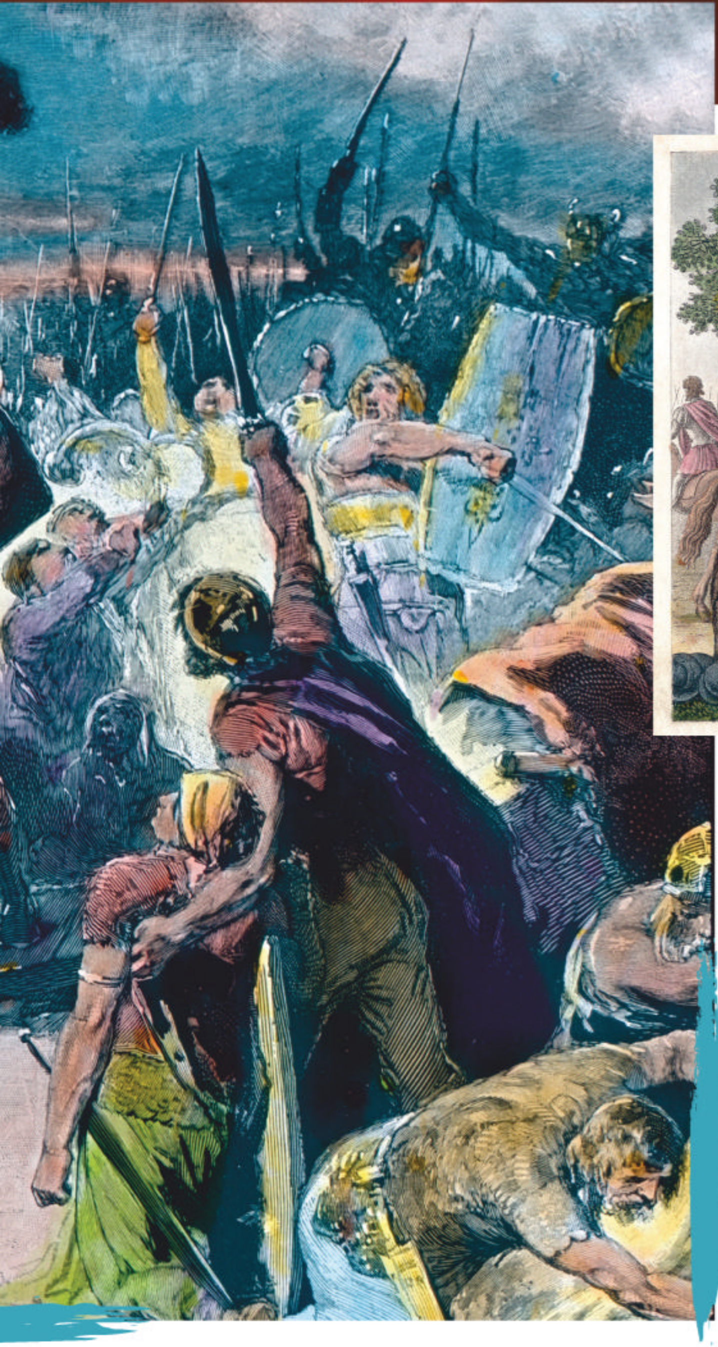


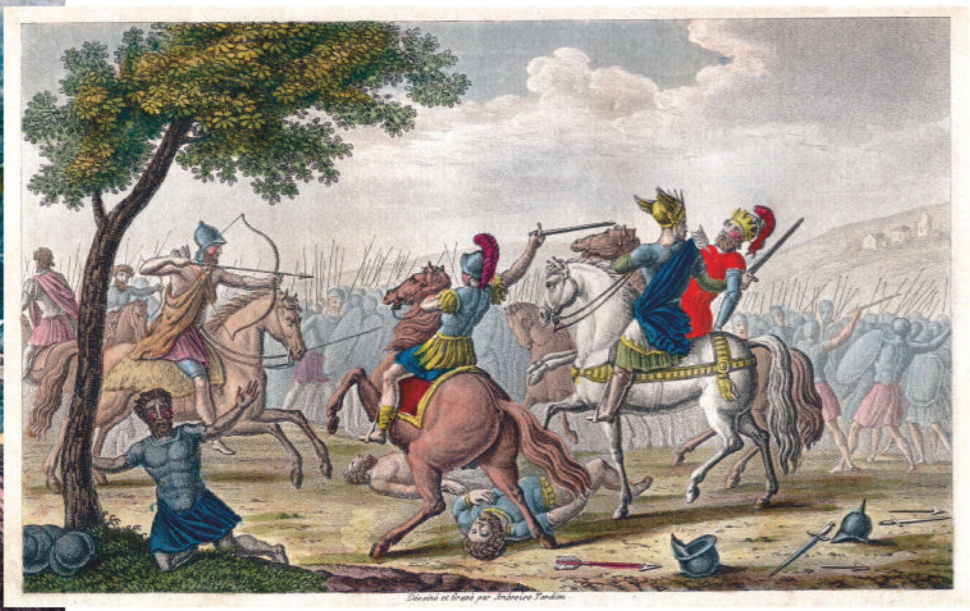
STE GENEVIEVE ET ATTILA

SHOWDOWN ON THE CATALAUNIAN PLAINS

Despite the empire's disarray, it would not be easy to advance up the Danube, cross the Rhine, file through the Vosges and Ardennes mountains, then crawl up the Moselle before spreading onto the campi (plains), which give Campania (Champagne) its name. Attila also had a particular problem with the Franks, who were in control of northern Gaul. Their teenage king Childeric appealed to Rome for help in securing his throne, and Aetius adopted him. So once in central Gaul, Attila would have enemies to both north and south.

We have some details of the Hun advance from Christian clerics eager to record Hun atrocities: towns ruined, churches destroyed, archives burned and bishops martyred. Via Trier and Metz, the Hun army marched west towards Troyes, at the southern fringe of open




Dessiné et Gravé par Ambroise Tardieu

grassland named after a local tribe, the Catalauni, where the Seine and Aube meander towards each other. Beyond, three weeks away, lay Orléans, where the panicky citizens prepared for a siege. A local leader, Anianus, set off to seek help from Aetius, who was 500km away at Arles, near the mouth of the Rhône. Three weeks down to the Mediterranean, three weeks' hard march back: the odds were in Attila's favour.

But first there was Troyes to deal with, a place of wood-and-thatch houses, a few stone villas, a large church – and no defensive walls. This easy target was saved by the local bishop, Lupus, or so his biographer claimed. But Christian biographies of bishops are notoriously eager to see signs of God's interference. Lupus confronts Attila, who introduces himself with the now-famous one-liner: "I am Attila, the scourge of God." But his words are quoted in Latin: "Ego sum Attila, flagellum Dei."

ABOVE Aetius' battle against the Huns was celebrated for centuries

ABOVE RIGHT Visigoth King Theodoric was killed fighting Huns on the Catalaunian Plain

LEFT Legend has it that St Genevieve's prayers saved Paris from attack by Attila

It has to be a myth. Lupus' biographer needed a Christian explanation for Attila's success. Since God is the Almighty, he would never allow a pagan to conquer Christians, therefore Attila must have God's blessing. Why would God do that? Because the Christians had fallen short and God was punishing them for their sins, metaphorically scourging them with a multi-thonged leather flail used to excoriate sinners – strip the skin from their backs. The words fitted Christian ideology perfectly. Within two centuries, it had become a cliché.

The conversation continues. "What mortal could stand against God's scourge?" says Lupus. And Attila promises to spare Troyes if Lupus stays with him; as a hostage, he would be a useful bargaining chip in any future negotiation.

On then towards Orléans.

Anianus was still with Aetius, saying the Romans had to get to Orléans by 1 July or it would be too late. Aetius promised, and Anianus headed home, leaving Aetius planning to fight the people he had known from childhood, used as mercenaries and worked with as a peace-keeper.

He just had time to arrange further help. To the south and west, in Aquitaine, the Visigoths had formed their own independent nation under their king, Theodoric. Though traditional enemies of Rome who had migrated right across the empire, Aetius counted on a good reception because they had settled and had ambitions to equal Rome in sophistication and culture. With Attila on his way, Aetius appealed to Theodoric, sending message from Emperor Valentinian himself: "Bravest of nations! It would be prudent of you to combine against Rome's oppressor." Theodoric came on board. "Romans, you shall have what you desire," he replied. "You have made Attila our foe as well."

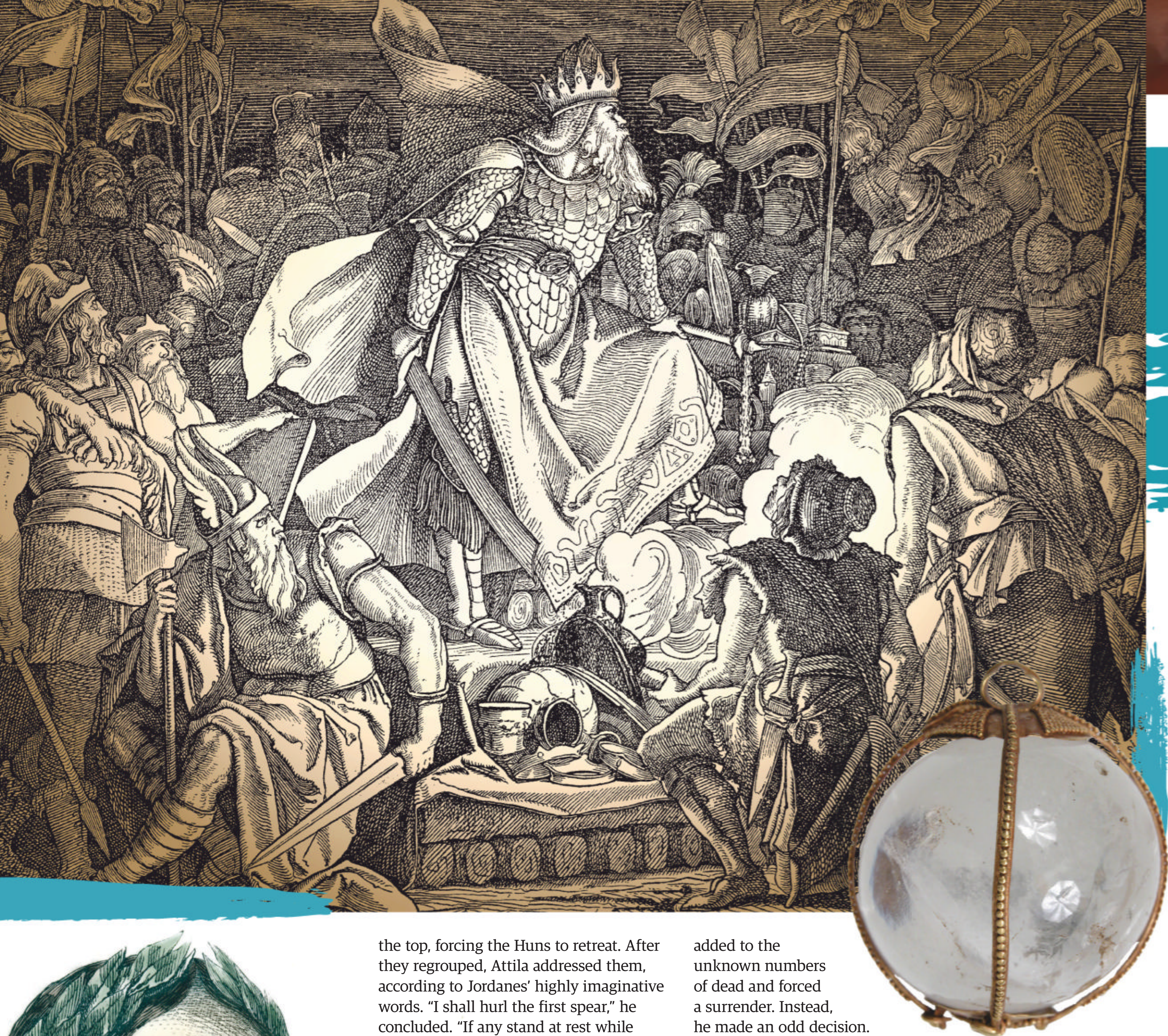
The race for Orléans was a close-run thing, with Aetius' joint armies arriving just in time, although one account has the Huns actually inside Orléans when Aetius arrives in a cloud of dust, eagle standards flying. The city was saved, an event that was remembered in prayers for the next 1,000 years, until it was superseded by a yet greater rescue, from the English, by Joan of Arc.

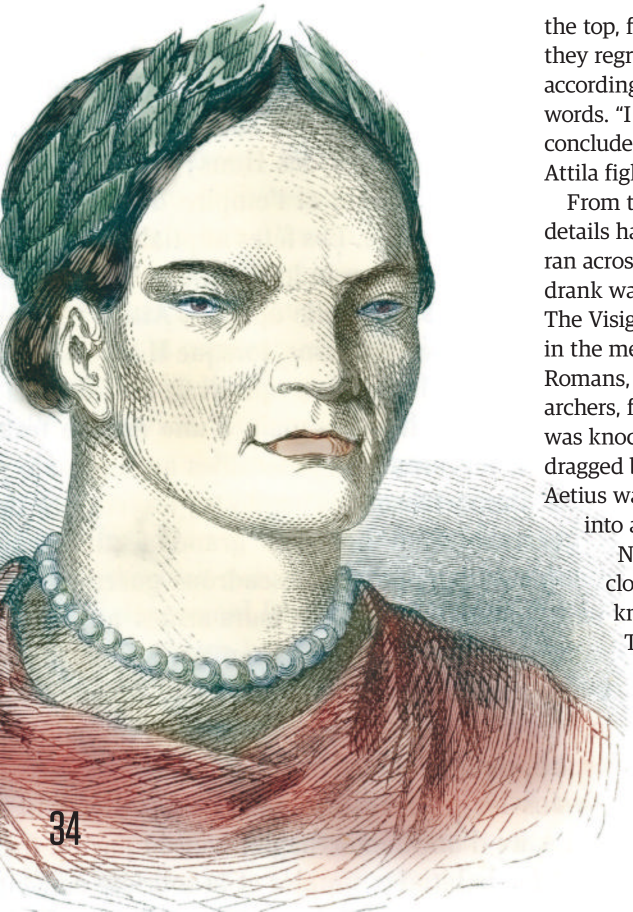
A week later, the retreating Huns approached Troyes once again, exhausted infantry and mounted archers screening the wagons, with Aetius planning a final showdown. Attila had a choice: either continue his retreat or stay and fight. His shamans, examining entrails, came up with an enigmatic prediction: if he fought, a great leader would die. Surely, he would have argued, this would be Aetius, and how could Aetius die if there was no battle? He would stay and fight.

"LUPUS' BIOGRAPHER NEEDED A CHRISTIAN EXPLANATION FOR ATTILA'S SUCCESS"

It was the afternoon of 21 June, the longest day, or thereabouts. This is a reliable detail amid a mass of doubtful ones – reliable because Halley's Comet, returning after 75 years, should have been visible. A historian in Spain recorded it, and so did Chinese astronomers. But no one on the Catalaunian Plain remarked its ominous glow, so it must have been cloudy. On a site no one has identified, Attila backed his laager of wagons against the Seine, with allied forces to right and left. Both sides then focused on a low hill, with the Visigoth winning a race to

All images: © Alamy, © Getty Images





the top, forcing the Huns to retreat. After they regrouped, Attila addressed them, according to Jordanes' highly imaginative words. "I shall hurl the first spear," he concluded. "If any stand at rest while Attila fights, that man is dead."

From the unreliable sources, a few details have the ring of truth. A stream ran across the plain and parched warriors drank water red with their own blood. The Visigothic King Theodoric vanished in the melee, trampled to death. The Romans, unbroken by Hun mounted archers, forced their way forward. Attila was knocked off his horse but was dragged back into the safety of the laager. Aetius was briefly lost until he stumbled into a Goth camp.

Night fell, silence with it. The clouds hid a half-moon, as we know from today's lunar tables. There was no rain to dampen the torn-up earth.

Aetius had the Huns surrounded. He could easily have renewed the attack, added to the unknown numbers of dead and forced a surrender. Instead, he made an odd decision. He let Attila go.

A FINAL CAMPAIGN

He had good political and strategic reasons. Theodoric was dead and his son Thorismund would need to secure the succession. Who knew what violence that would unleash? Perhaps the old enemies of Rome would rise to be enemies again. The Huns, though - these he knew about. Now that Attila was broken, he could deal with them and might even need them as future allies. Within days, the Visigoths left for Toulouse, the Franks for Belgium, while Attila and his shattered force began the long trek home.

What of Bishop Lupus, saviour of Troyes, hostage and now Attila's guide? Having seen the Huns safely back to the Rhine, he was released, lived another 25 years and was in due course canonised

TOP Attila and his followers finally met their match on the Catalaunian Plain

ABOVE INSET Jewellery like this pendant was acquired by Attila's rich followers via either trade or raids

LEFT There are many 'portraits' of Attila but none are genuine or accurate

RIGHT Attila died on the night of his wedding to Ildico

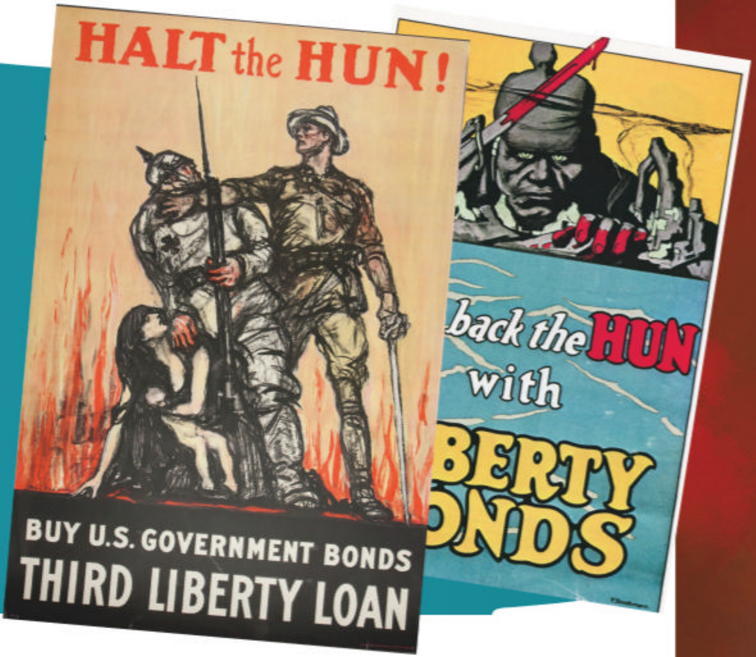
THE DREADFUL HUN

How Germany became associated with Attila's people

The Huns returned to popular awareness in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, when a widely syndicated article compared the Germans to the Huns and Kaiser Wilhelm I to Attila. The Germans welcomed the comparison. In 1900, sending his troops off to China to counter the Boxer Uprising, Wilhelm II told them to remember the Huns "so may the name of Germany become known in such manner in China". In 1914, writer Rudyard Kipling brought the comparison to his English readers with a poem that urged them to war:

"For all we have and are,
For all our children's fate,
Stand up and take the war.
The Hun is at the gate!"

In WWI, the equation of 'German equals Hun' was a propaganda slogan that spread across the English-speaking world and was attached by journalists to any German atrocity, real or fake. On 10 November 1918, the *News of the World* proclaimed "Hun Surrender Certain". But the comparison slipped out of fashion in the 1930s in the face of a greater evil: the rise of Hitler.



as St Loup, his name recalled in three-dozen places.

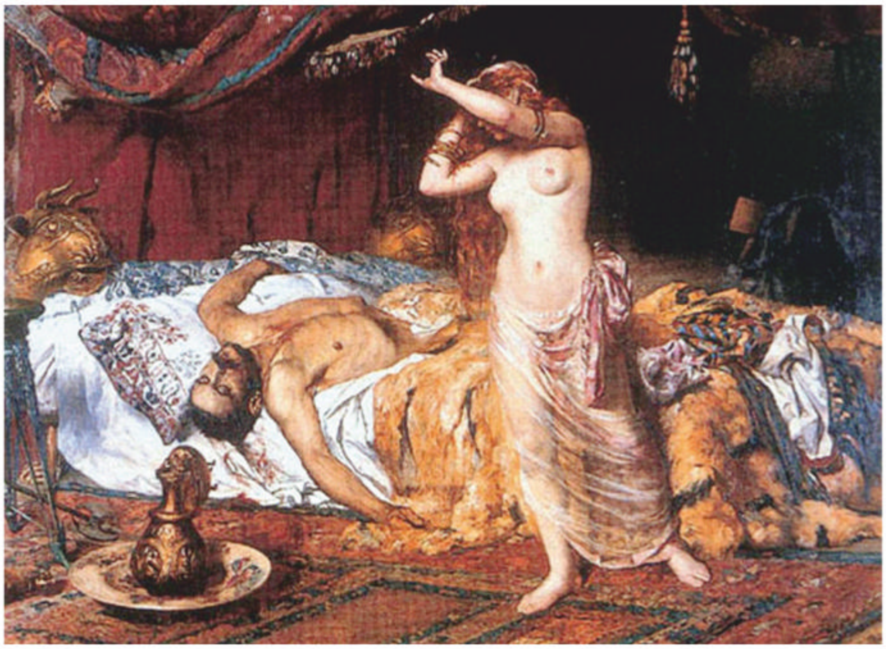
Attila had escaped, narrowly and by pure chance, but he was not one to retire gracefully. His wealth was leaking away, his followers restless. He had Honoria to save and a dowry to collect. He would try again, and this time strike at Rome's heartland.

It started well in the autumn of 452 CE, with a hard-fought siege of Aquileia, a wealthy city north-east of Venice. Six cities from Padua to Milan opened their gates to the Huns. But then, disaster. September in the Po plain was oppressive, with malaria-carrying mosquitoes. Sickness was probably the Romans' greatest weapon, though one account claimed it was all down to Pope Leo I with his close companion, God. Leo met Attila, who, according to the chronicler Prosper, "was so flattered by the presence of the highest priest that he ordered his men to stop the hostilities and, promising peace, returned beyond the border." But disease and famine and a realisation of the task ahead would have been reasons enough to make a deal and head home.

"ATTILA HAD A CHOICE: EITHER CONTINUE HIS RETREAT OR STAY AND FIGHT"

There, in the spring of 453 CE, Attila chose, or accepted, a new young wife, Ildico. What happened on the wedding night was recounted by Priscus, his words surviving in Jordanes' history. The king, very much the worse for drink, retired with his bride. Later the next day, worried servants broke in to find Ildico weeping and Attila dead, drowned by an "effusion" of his own blood – possibly caused by the effects of alcohol on a varicose vein.

After days of ritual mourning, he was buried in an unknown grave. Folklore claims his body was placed in a triple coffin – gold, silver and steel – but it's nonsense. That would have taken years of work, cost a fortune and weighed tonnes. But treasure hunters have been looking for the grave ever since. It seems that people cannot easily accept a simple burial for the man who had played such a part in the coming fall of Rome. His legacy was not his empire – that was squandered by squabbling heirs – but his reputation as Europe's bogeyman.



FURTHER READING

SUBSCRIBER EXCLUSIVE

Dig deeper into Roman military history with Caesar Vs Gaul in issue 140 via our digital archive

SCAN HERE

All images: © Alamy; © Getty Images

MAKING A MONSTER

THE CREATION OF THE FRANKENSTEIN LEGEND

Piecing together the inspirations and evolution of Mary Shelley's famous monster

Written by Callum McKelvie

In 1818, man made a monster for the first, though certainly not the last, time. Released that year, Mary Shelley's Gothic novel *Frankenstein* was a gruesome story of an ambitious young man who defies the laws of nature to create a living creature from rotting cadavers. The grisly tale shocked and delighted the public in equal measure and continues to sell around 4,000 copies a year. In the years since its publication, *Frankenstein* has evolved from a mere story to a modern myth. This evolution has caused strange tales to circulate regarding the novel's origins, as well as inconsistencies between what are popularly considered Frankensteinian tropes and what actually appears on the page. For example, Mary's creature wasn't birthed by lightning, there is no castle, and let's not even begin to discuss bolt-necked monsters! Nonetheless, these elements have a fascinating historical pedigree, from the life of Mary herself to her supposed inspirations and even subsequent adaptations.

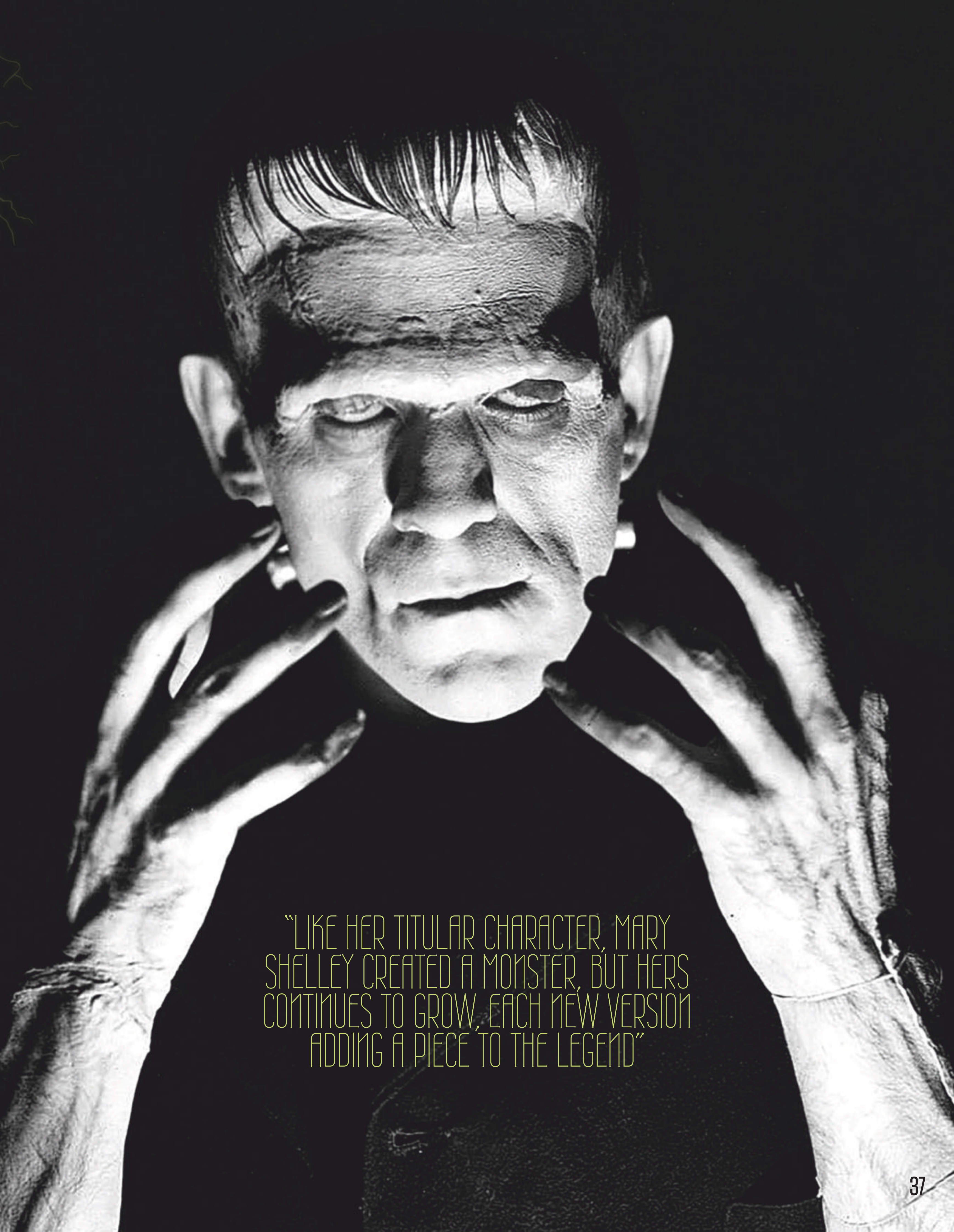
THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT MARY

Born Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, Mary Shelley came into the world on 30 August 1797. She had serious literary pedigree, being the child of writers William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft. Her mother is considered one of the founders of feminism and is famed for her works on the subject but passed away only 11 days after Mary's birth. Mary had no formal education, but was tutored by her father and read voraciously. She would do much of her reading upon her mother's tomb in St Pancras graveyard in London. Mary also demonstrated a precocious early desire to follow in her parents' footsteps and, at the tender age of 14, published her first poem.

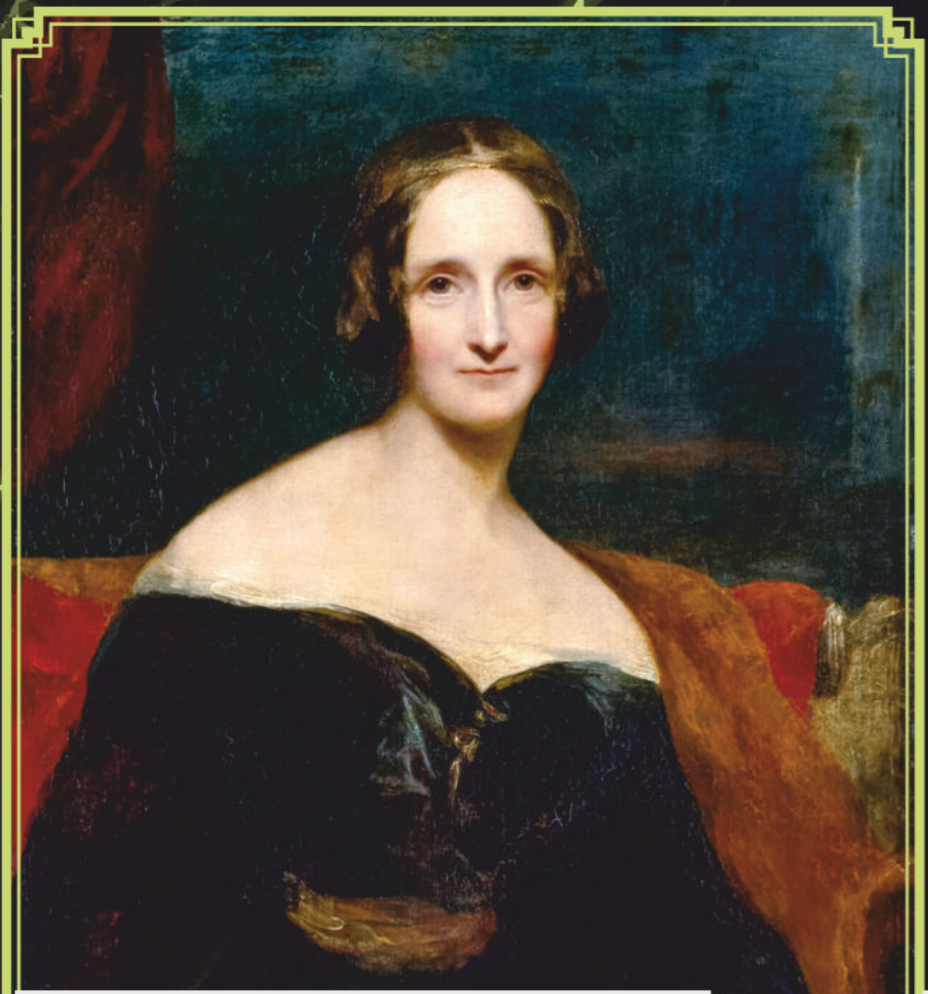
Her father's literary career meant he sometimes received famous guests at the family home. One evening, poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge visited and recited *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Mary was present, albeit discreetly hidden beneath the settee. When discovered, it was Coleridge who argued that she be allowed to stay. He then continued the recital with his young guest listening happily. The event likely had a profound impact on Mary, as the epic poem is alluded to multiple times throughout *Frankenstein*.

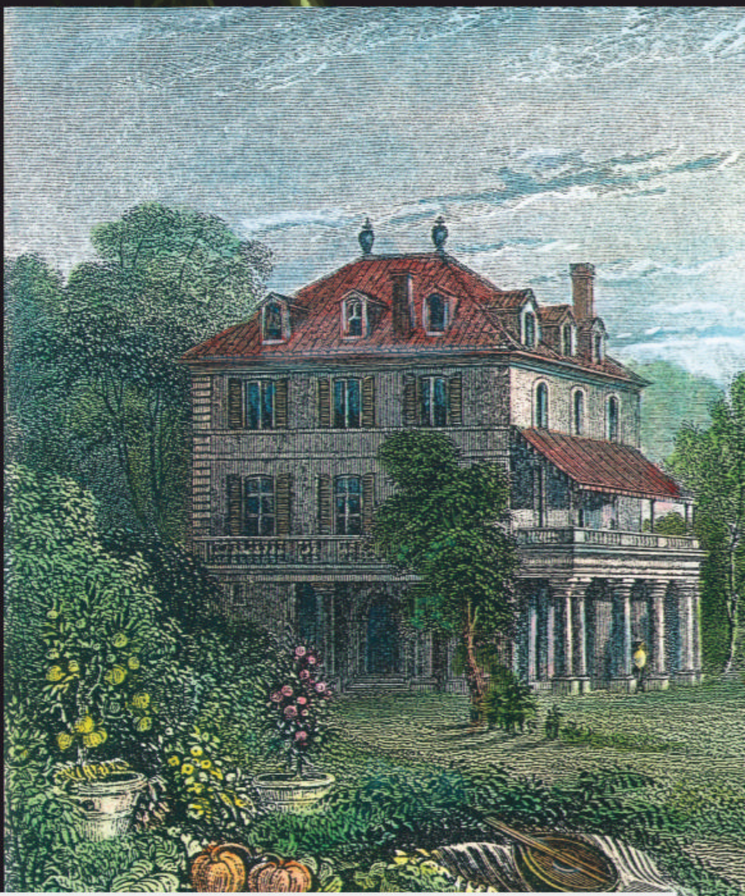
In 1812, the course of her life changed forever when she was introduced to a young, free-spirited poet and admirer of her father: Percy Bysshe Shelley. Mary was so enamoured that by 1814 they were in a romantic relationship, despite Percy already being married. The pair fled to Europe together and in 1815 had their first child. But tragedy struck as the infant girl was born premature and barely survived a few days. Mary was only 17 at the time. It was a year later that the young couple, along with a few close friends, decided to spend the summer in Switzerland, in a quaint villa close to Lake Geneva.

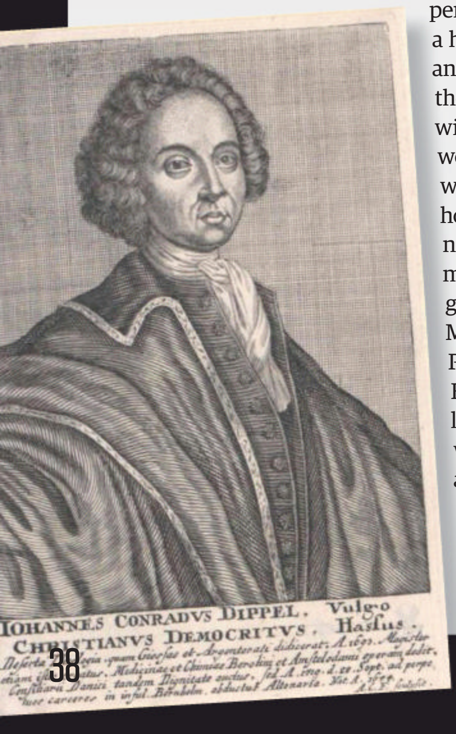
All images: © Adobe Stock, © Alamy



> "LIKE HER TITULAR CHARACTER, MARY SHELLEY CREATED A MONSTER, BUT HERS CONTINUES TO GROW, EACH NEW VERSION ADDING A PIECE TO THE LEGEND"






IOHANNES CONRADVS DIPPEL. Vulgo
CHRISTIANVS DEMOCRITVS. Hasſus.

ABOVE Mary Shelley first conceived of *Frankenstein* when she was just 18

ABOVE-RIGHT Mary came up with the idea for her story while staying at the Villa Diodati in Switzerland

ABOVE-INSET The frontispiece to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*

BELOW-LEFT German alchemist Johann Konrad Dippel's macabre experiments may have inspired Mary

THUNDER AND LIGHTNING, VERY VERY FRIGHTENING

It's fairly well known that Mary first conceived of *Frankenstein* while at the villa. This event in itself has become legendary, being depicted in 1935's *The Bride of Frankenstein* and inspiring many other films, including Ken Russell's *Gothic* (1986). In 1815 Mount Tambora erupted and the extreme weather this caused resulted in the following year becoming known as 'the year without a summer'. Mary and her companions, consisting of Percy, her stepsister Claire Clairmont, physician John William Polidori and poet Lord Byron, found themselves trapped inside due to the stormy weather. With little to occupy their time, they read supernatural stories, among them *Fantasmagoriana*, an 1812 collection of German ghost stories.

Then Byron had an idea – they would have a contest. Each person would compose a horror story of their own and whichever was judged the most frightening would win. The subsequent tales would lead to two landmark works within the Gothic horror genre, but ironically neither one was from the more celebrated writers in the group. This included not only Mary's *Frankenstein* but also Polidori's story *The Vampyre*. His text is considered by literary historians to be a key work of vampire fiction and one of the primary inspirations behind Bram Stoker's *Dracula*.

Three years after that gloomy summer, Mary's revised and expanded version of her story was published. There were, of course, events that occurred within the villa that likely inspired the five participants – conversations, stories read aloud – though we shall never know the exact details. However, similarities between Mary's *Frankenstein* and real historical places and figures have caused some historians to wonder whether there were more direct inspirations.

JOHANN KONRAD DIPPEL: HE'S A SOUL MAN

High in the hills of western Germany, among the dense forests of the Odenwald mountain range, sit the ruins of Castle Frankenstein. No, not a papier-mâché model out of a Hammer Horror film, but the real deal in all its spooktacular glory. Built during the 13th century, by the time Mary ventured down the Rhine following her elopement in 1814, the castle had already fallen into disrepair. While we have no evidence that she visited the ruins herself, she did spend a few hours in the nearby town of Gernsheim. Here, it's possible she just might have been able to catch a fleeting glimpse of the foreboding structure and may even have heard tales of its previous occupant – alchemist, physician and occultist Johann Konrad Dippel.

Dippel was born in the castle on 10 August 1673 and throughout his lifetime developed a reputation as something of a rebel. He even spent seven years behind bars for heresy on the Danish island of Bornholm. Dippel was also an alchemist, a subject he first became interested in during his early twenties. While we now think of the character Victor Frankenstein solely as a scientist, Mary frequently references alchemy, specifically naming the works of Cornelius Agrippa, Albertus Magnus and Paracelsus.

We also know that Dippel was fond of experimenting with cadavers, though primarily those of animals rather than humans. His most famous creation was a black ooze, distilled from various parts, named Dippel's Oil. It was believed that this substance was a universal cure, with Dippel's contemporary Peter Shaw claiming it could "cure intermittents by being rubbed externally along the backbone before a cold fit". When dye-maker Diesbach

accidentally combined the oil with a fluid made from the boiled bodies of cochineal insects, he created a rich blue colour. The resultant dye, now known as Berlin Blue, remains the primary tool used by pathologists when detecting lead poisoning.

Other bizarre experiments that the alchemist purportedly conducted included attempts at transferring the human soul from one body to another using some form of funnel. While concrete evidence of his experiments in this field is lacking, he did write about his theories in a 1736 treatise. It's ironic that one of the many *Frankenstein* films produced during the 20th century, 1967's *Frankenstein Created Woman*, features a plot involving soul transference instead of stitched-together monstrosities. While it's unlikely the film's screenwriter Anthony Hinds was inspired by Dippel, it is another example of the strange connective tissue that ties together the various pieces of the *Frankenstein* legend. As a side note, the film is considered a favourite of director Martin Scorsese, who once said: "If I singled this one out, it's not because I like it the best - it's a sadistic film, very difficult to watch - but because, here, they actually isolate the soul."

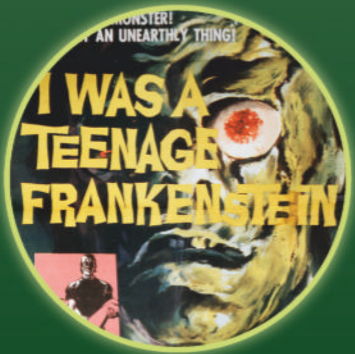
ARE FIENDS ELECTRIC?

In the 1942 film *Ghost of Frankenstein*, Bela Lugosi's Ygor proclaims to the monster: "Your father was Frankenstein, but your mother was the lightning!" This is just one example of the common misconception that it's lightning that helps birth the creature. However, in her original story Mary doesn't provide an exact description of the method used in the monster's creation, referring only to a "spark of life". Lightning does feature in the novel, but in a different way, with Victor witnessing a bolt destroying a tree when he is 15. Nonetheless, the 19th century was a time of astounding developments in the research of electricity, which the author was doubtless aware of.

In 1786, the Italian scientist Luigi Galvani had poked the nerves of a dead frog with a scalpel, watching eagerly as the creature's legs twitched. Delaying his findings until 1791, he concluded that the movement was due to "animal electricity". ▶

FRANKENSTEIN ON FILM

The novel has inspired some decidedly strange movies

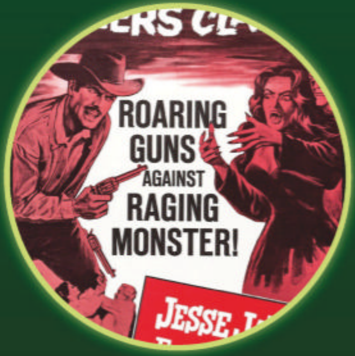

MONSTER!
AN UNEARTHLY THING!
I WAS A TEENAGE FRANKENSTEIN

I WAS A TEENAGE FRANKENSTEIN 1957

The follow-up to *I Was A Teenage Werewolf*, this film was released in the same year as Hammer Films' monumentally successful *The Curse of Frankenstein*. *I Was A Teenage Frankenstein* follows the adolescent monster, played by Gary Conway, and he returned in 1958's *How To Make A Monster*, which acted as a meta-sequel to both films.

FRANKENSTEIN CONQUERS THE WORLD 1965

Part of the Japanese giant-monster genre known as Kaiju, Nazi officers steal the heart of the monster and transport it to Hiroshima. The atomic bomb leads to the discovery two decades later of a Frankenstein child who quickly grows to gigantic size. Naturally, the film ends with him fighting a giant lizard.


ROARING GUNS AGAINST RAGING MONSTER!
JESSE J

JESSE JAMES MEETS FRANKENSTEIN'S DAUGHTER 1966

Infamous outlaw Jesse James faces off against the evil granddaughter (the title is somewhat misleading!) of Frankenstein after she transforms his friend into a monster. The film was released as part of a double bill alongside the equally woeful *Billy the Kid vs Dracula*.

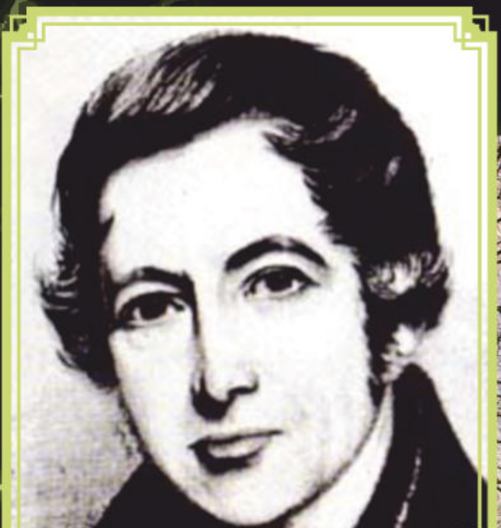
FRANKENSTEIN AND THE MONSTER FROM HELL 1974

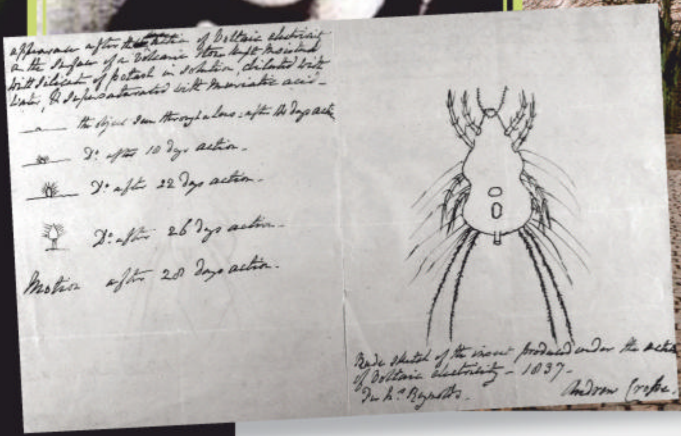
The final movie in Hammer Films' *Frankenstein* series, *Frankenstein and the Monster From Hell* is an even bleaker affair than its title suggests. Peter Cushing's Baron Frankenstein attempts to create life one last time - from the confines of a mental institution. David Prowse, who later played Darth Vader, portrays the weirdly hairy monster.

FRANKENSTEIN UNBOUND 1990

John Hurt and Raul Julia star in this futuristic take on the *Frankenstein* story, in which Hurt's time-travelling scientist is accidentally transported back to the 19th century. He encounters the real Victor Frankenstein, two monsters, a futuristic car and lots of lasers. *Unbound* is a fun, if very silly, romp.

All images: © Adobe Stock, © Alamy, © Getty Images, © Shutterstock





Appearance after the action of Voltaic electricity on the surface of a Volcanic Stone kept moistened with silicate of potash in solution, diluted with water, & supersaturated with muriatic acid.

the object seen through a lens: after [illegible] days action

D° after 10 days action.

D° after 22 days action.

D° after 26 days action.

Motion after 28 days action.

Rude sketch of the insect produced under the action of Voltaic electricity – 1837 –
For Mr Reynolds –
Andrew Crosse.

Castle Frankenstein in the Odenwald, Germany. Did Mary Shelley hear stories of the strange events that took place here?

TOP Andrew Crosse, the 19th century scientist known as the Lightning Man

ABOVE A sketch of the insects Crosse is said to have created while charging a volcanic rock with electricity

Galvani's nephew Giovanni Aldini furthered his uncle's work with Galvanism, using electric charges to cause severed hands to throw coins and decapitated heads to grin, and in 1803 he experimented on the corpse of murderer George Foster. Mary herself noted in the introduction to the 1831 edition of her novel that "perhaps a corpse would be re-animated. Galvanism had given token of such things."

Other scientists were dabbling in this new form of energy at the same time as Aldini. One such figure was British scientist Andrew Crosse, who began to experiment with electricity in 1807. On 28 December 1814 it's said that Mary and Percy Shelley braved the frozen streets of London to see Crosse speak in person. However, it's hard to verify if this claim is true, or if his lecture was a direct inspiration upon the young Mary. Nonetheless, Crosse deserves a mention due to bizarre events that occurred 18 years after *Frankenstein*'s publication.

In 1836 Crosse placed a piece of volcanic rock in acid and passed an electrical charge through it. He was amazed when he witnessed strange mite-like creatures swarming upon the stone, noting how each had "assumed the form of a perfect insect, standing erect on a few bristles which formed its tail". Regarding the origins of the creatures, Crosse himself stated: "I have never ventured an opinion as to the cause of their birth, and for a very good reason – I was unable to form one."

PLAYING GOD

Mary passed away on 1 February 1851 at the age of 53. In the years since her demise the popularity of her story only continued to grow. Adaptations occurred as early as 1823, with Richard Peake's theatrical production *Presumption, or The Fate of Frankenstein* thought to be the first. His play introduced a character named Fritz, later immortalised in a 1931 film as a hunchbacked servant, now considered the precursor to the Igor figure. Mary saw the production and, although she enjoyed the

HERE COMES THE BRIDE

The origins of horror's most famous fiancée

Step outside your home on Halloween and one of the most recognisable costumes you'll likely see is that of Frankenstein's monster and his bride. But in the original novel, while the monster does indeed demand Victor creates a companion for him, the bride is destroyed before the scientist imbues it with life. It was director James Whale who gave us the iconic image of the bride, in her flowing white surgical gown and white-streaked hair in his 1935 masterpiece *The Bride of Frankenstein*.

Despite the massive box office success of Whale's 1931 film *Frankenstein*, he was reluctant to return for a sequel and was only persuaded after he was promised creative freedom. Rereading Mary Shelley's novel for inspiration, he hit upon the idea of the bride as the central figure, portrayed by Elsa Lanchester. Whale also incorporated a prologue where Mary herself, played by the same actress, appears at the Villa Diodati in Switzerland. Whale was an openly gay man and imbued *The Bride of Frankenstein* with a camp sense of humour. Due to this and the film's layers of subtext, it's now considered a pioneering example of 'Queer Horror'.

> "ALDINI USED ELECTRIC CHARGES TO CAUSE SEVERED HANDS TO THROW COINS AND DECAPITATED HEADS TO GRIN, AND IN 1803 EXPERIMENTED ON THE CORPSE OF MURDERER GEORGE FOSTER"

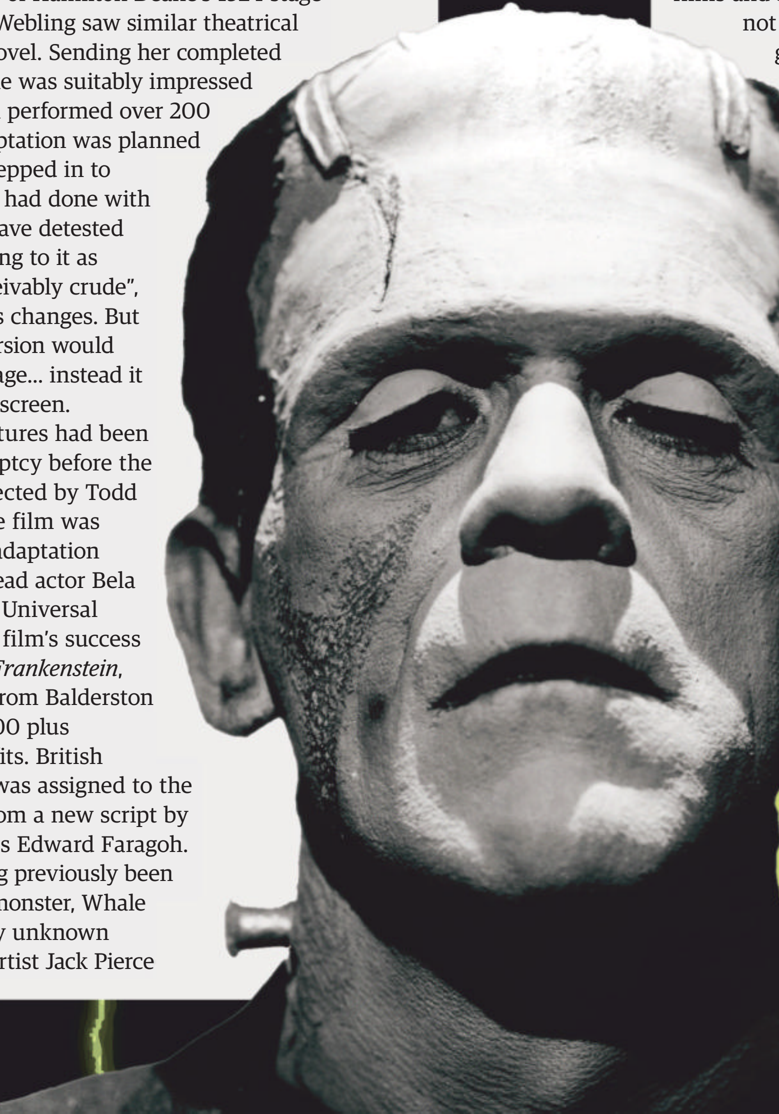
performance of TP Cooke as the monster (and the gimmick of not naming him in the playbill), she remarked that "the story is not well managed."

Mary would doubtless have been displeased by the continued tendency to stray from her novel, with an 1826 production making her articulate monster mute (a characteristic that remained in subsequent adaptations) and ending with him throwing himself into a volcano. The dawn of the 20th century brought with it increasing advancements in a new medium: cinema. The first film version, the Thomas Edison studio's 1910 production, continued this trend and was even subtitled *A Liberal Adaptation*. But what would Mary have thought of the most recognised depiction of her famous creature, the flat-headed, bolt-necked monstrosity?

A UNIVERSAL-LY RECOGNISED MONSTER

The story of the 1931 film of *Frankenstein* begins with another female writer – playwright, novelist and poet Peggy Webling. Inspired by the success of Hamilton Deane's 1924 stage adaptation of *Dracula*, Webling saw similar theatrical potential in Shelley's novel. Sending her completed manuscript to Deane, he was suitably impressed and by 1931 it had been performed over 200 times. A Broadway adaptation was planned and John Balderston stepped in to perform rewrites, as he had done with *Dracula*. He is said to have detested Webling's script, referring to it as "illiterate" and "inconceivably crude", and he made numerous changes. But Balderston's revised version would never make it to the stage… instead it was headed for the big screen.

In 1931 Universal Pictures had been on the brink of bankruptcy before the success of *Dracula*, directed by Todd Browning, saved it. The film was based on Balderston's adaptation and even featured its lead actor Bela Lugosi in the title role. Universal hoped to replicate that film's success with an adaptation of *Frankenstein*, purchasing the rights from Balderston and Webling for $20,000 plus one percent of the profits. British director James Whale was assigned to the production, working from a new script by Garrett Fort and Francis Edward Faragoh.



Despite Lugosi having previously been offered the role of the monster, Whale chose to cast the largely unknown Boris Karloff. Makeup artist Jack Pierce set about transforming the actor, creating the look that became iconic. The adaptation switched the novel's action from Switzerland to a crumbling castle in Bavaria. While Webling's play ends with the monster being struck by lightning, the film introduces a famous sequence in which the monster is imbued with life during a violent electrical storm. The movie was phenomenally successful and became a huge money-maker for Universal Pictures, earning $12 million by 1953 through various re-releases. "It created the definitive movie image of the mad scientist and his monster," observed writer Sir Christopher Frayling.

ABOVE *Frankenstein Created Woman* (1967) deals with soul transference, paralleling the experiments of Johann Dippell

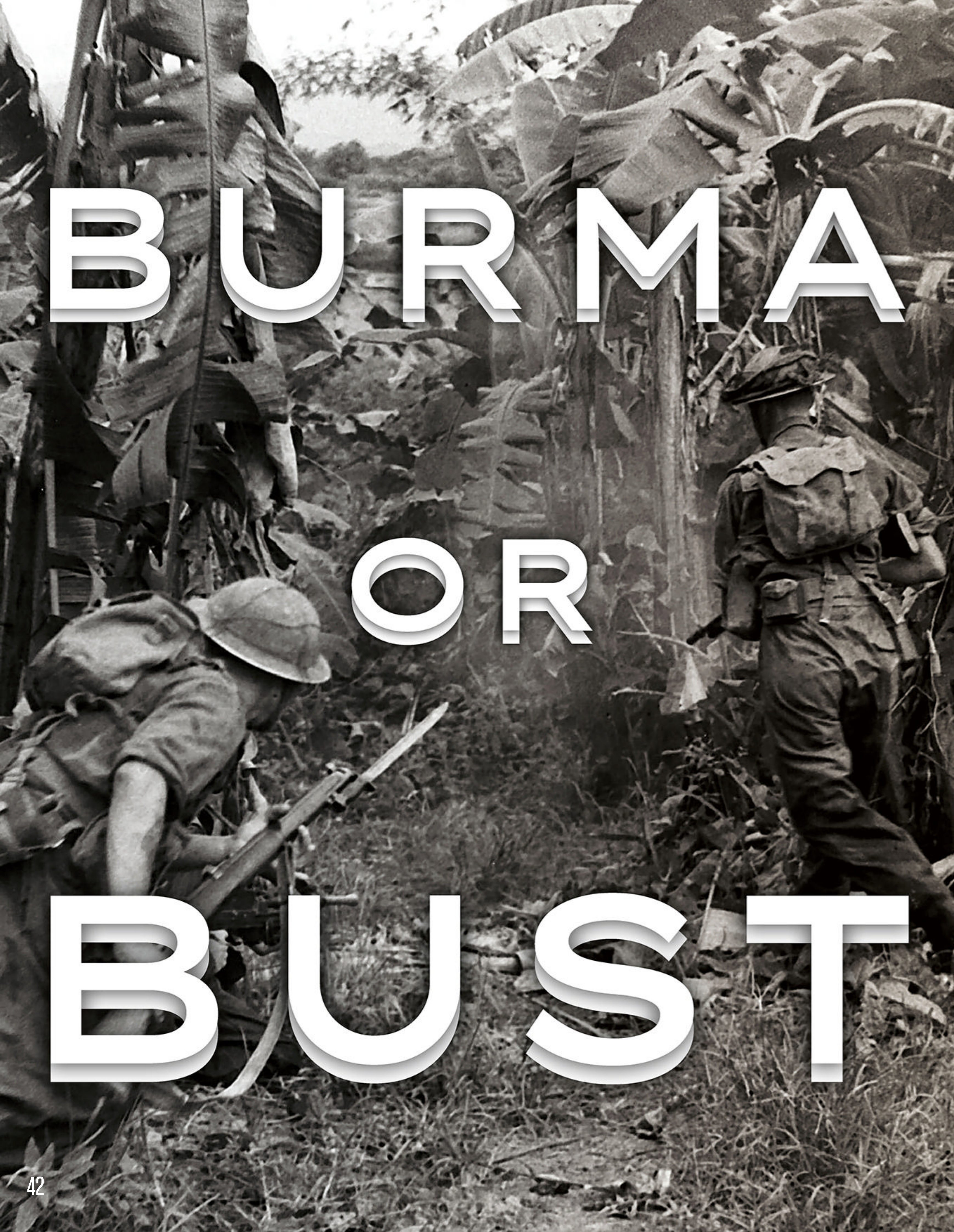
IT'S ALIVE!

Over 200 years since its publication, Mary's terrifying tale lives on. Her original *Frankenstein* novel is so powerful that it formed a broad canvas for other creators to draw on. As of September 2025 there have been 420 feature films, 193 short films and 332 television adaptations drawing from her work, not to mention hundreds of plays, books, short stories, graphic novels and radio dramas. What's more, these derivatives have begun to draw upon each other, such as Maggie Gyllenhaal's upcoming 2026 film *The Bride*, which is reported to be inspired by 1935's *The Bride of Frankenstein*. These numerous modern interpretations draw on the past, on Mary's life and the various events that inspired her. Just like her titular character, Mary Shelley created a monster, but hers continues to grow and thrive, with each new version adding another chapter to the legend. *Frankenstein* lives!

BELOW-RIGHT Director James Whale and star Boris Karloff filming *The Bride of Frankenstein*

All images: © Adobe Stock, © Alamy, © Getty Images, © Shutterstock

BURMA OR BUST



The jungle warfare in the Far East was both a tactical and political challenge for British forces in WWII

Interview by Jonathan Gordon

© DB Photography Sussex

EXPERT BIO

LUCY BETTERIDGE-DYSON

Betteridge-Dyson is a military historian, author and broadcaster with a focus on the First and Second World Wars. She co-presented *48 Hours to Victory* on Channel 4 as well as the podcast *Obsessed With… SAS Rogue Heroes* for BBC Sounds.

WORCESTER 5100 MILES & NO WAY OUT
TOKYO 2800 MILES & WAY OUT

LEFT An M3 tank during the Battle of Imphal-Kohima in 1944

RIGHT A Worcestershire Yeoman stands by a sign with the distances to Worcester and Tokyo

The efforts of Allied forces in Asia during the Second World War are all too frequently overlooked. The fighting carried on longer in this region - three months past VE Day (8 May 1945) - and covered a much larger area. In Burma (modern-day Myanmar) from 1941 to 1945, forces from across the British Empire battled to push back the Japanese occupiers and reclaim the strategically vital region. But just as important was showing solidarity with the United States and keeping them engaged in the fight. We are delighted to talk to Lucy Betteridge-Dyson, whose new book *Jungle Commandos* delves deep into the Burma campaign and its significance, with first-hand accounts informing her insight, including those of her grandfather.

What were some of the unique challenges faced by British forces fighting in Burma?

To fully appreciate the scale of the challenge in Burma, one has to grasp the vastness and diversity of the landscape. The campaign was fought across an area twice the size of Germany, encompassing everything from dense tropical jungles and expansive plains to towering mountain ranges. This geographic diversity was mirrored by the complex cultural and political landscape, where allegiances could shift from village to village - sometimes favouring the Allies, sometimes the Axis. Add to that the punishing monsoon season, which dominates half the year, and the fact that British forces initially knew little about their Japanese enemy or the terrain, and you begin to understand just how formidable the task of waging war in the country was. On top of all this, the theatre was politically fraught, with Britain having to navigate a complex alliance with China and the United States. Burma was a theatre that demanded flexibility and adaptation from British leaders and their forces like nowhere else in the world. Not only did success require masterful diplomacy but also an ability to learn how to operate effectively while starved of resources and maintain operational and tactically flexibility. They had to develop new fighting techniques suited to the unfamiliar terrain, understand the country's nuanced cultural and social makeup, and somehow keep morale intact after a series of early defeats. It was an environment that tested every aspect of military effectiveness.

What made Burma so important to the war?

While it's often claimed that the Japanese first invaded Burma to gain access to its natural resources, this was only a secondary benefit to their main objective: capturing the Burma Road. This was central to a vital supply line being used by the United States to support Chinese forces under the Lend-Lease Act. By severing this link, Tokyo hoped to weaken two of its biggest adversaries in the region with one blow. For the British, while securing India's border against the Japanese threat on its doorstep was important, it was the political imperative to support the United States that made recapturing Burma such a pressing issue. Demonstrating commitment to the region

All images: © Alamy, © Getty Images

ABOVE-LEFT The fighting in Burma varied from jungles and fields to densely populated cities

ABOVE-RIGHT Japanese forces cross a makeshift bridge early in the campaign

All images: © Getty Images

helped cement US support for the war effort in Europe, something Britain desperately needed if they were to defeat Germany. The Burma campaign had unparalleled strategic, political and symbolic significance for the Allies – reaching far beyond the country's own borders.

What were some of the key events and campaigns in Burma that people should know about?

One of the biggest problems with how Burma is remembered today is that the narrative presented to the public in the media is very narrow – mostly limited to stories of the Chindits, Burma-Thai railway and the horrendous suffering of [Allied] prisoners of war. While these are, of course, all important parts of the Burma story, they only scratch the surface of what was a complex four-year campaign. From the chaotic initial retreat – the largest in British military history – to the disastrous First Arakan campaign in 1942-43 and the later pivotal battles like Admin Box, Kohima and Imphal and countless other engagements, the evolution of British and Indian military capability can be clearly traced in Burma. This demands far greater attention because the better we understand our past, the more informed we can be about the future, particularly when it comes to warfare. Yet the majority of these battles remain unknown to the general public – for no good reason. *Jungle Commandos* focuses on the Third Arakan campaign of 1944-45, for example, and I wonder how many readers will be familiar with the battles of Hill 1433, Hill 170 or the landings at Myebon and Ramree, despite them marking the climax of all that British forces had learnt in their fight for the country. The campaign involved daring combined operations, deep-penetration missions and some of the bloodiest fighting of the war, with XV Corps succeeding in pushing the Japanese (who just a year or so earlier were viewed by many as 'unbeatable') out of the region completely. The troops who secured these victories surely deserve no less attention than those who fought in Europe.

Being so far from home, were British forces in Burma supplied effectively?

The short answer is no, but also yes. Due to the British government's 'Germany first' policy, the Burma theatre was chronically under-resourced. Equipment, ammunition, landing craft etc were nearly always in short supply and operations often had to be cancelled last-minute as a result of supplies being diverted to other theatres. Yet the ingenuity with which these limited supplies were delivered to troops on the ground in Burma was extraordinary. Take the 81st and 82nd West African Divisions in the Kaladan valley, for example. The terrain made it impossible to provide overground supplies (as was the case in most of Burma) so troops were sustained entirely by airdrops. Despite the complex logistics involved, with men often having to hand-build airstrips in the middle of virgin jungle, these missions were a remarkable success.

> "THE JAPANESE WERE INFLUENCED BY THE ANCIENT BUSHIDO CODE, WHICH EMPHASISED DEATH BEFORE DISHONOUR"

Ironically, I would also argue that the limited resources available to forces in the theatre contributed to the Allies' eventual success. One of [Field Marshal William] Slim and [Admiral Lord Louis] Mountbatten's first priorities was to turn the feelings of frustration and neglect shared by many of the men under their command into a strength, building a unifying ethos around the 'Forgotten Army' moniker by instilling pride in their ability to do anything troops elsewhere in the world could do but with far less. It was a hardship that bred a kind of ingenuity and resilience unique to the Burma campaign.

Tell us about the Allied troops in Burma and their experience going into the war?

It's important to first recognise that no two soldiers' experiences were the same. This is particularly true of the Fourteenth Army, which was the most culturally and religiously diverse army in history. By April 1945 there were over 1.3 million people serving under South East Asia Command; of those 58 percent were Indian

– making up the largest volunteer army in history – and 21 percent British, while approximately 100,000 troops from East and West African nations also served, as well as tens of thousands from China and the United States.

What these men experienced varied greatly. One of the things I touch upon in *Jungle Commandos* is the recruitment of men for the 81st and 82nd West African Divisions, whose recruitment stories are both fascinating and complex. While coercive colonial conscription certainly played a role, many African soldiers also enlisted willingly, motivated by a desire for adventure, steady income, or the chance to serve a larger cause. Their voices have too often been left out of the story.

What notable tactical innovations or advancements should people know about?

One of the most remarkable developments from my perspective was the use of combined operations in a jungle setting. Burma's coastline, particularly in Arakan, is deeply fractured and covered in many small rivers and streams known as 'chaungs'. Navigating these unmapped waterways and landing troops through mangrove swamps required a new level of creativity from naval forces. On land, development of the defensive 'box' – where units held firm even when surrounded – revolutionised the way Allied forces engaged with the Japanese. Medical advancements were also vital, especially in combating tropical diseases like malaria, which posed as much of a threat as the enemy. These innovations were born of necessity and refined in battle, forming a blueprint for future jungle warfare techniques, some of which are still in use today.

What was the Japanese approach to Burma and did it differ at all to the Allied thinking?

Initially the tactics used by the Japanese and Allies could not have been more different. A perfect example of this contrast is the failed British offensive in Arakan in 1942-43, during which Commander Noel Irwin relied on the premise that with large frontal attacks the British could sweep down Arakan and blast the Japanese into submission. [This was] similar to tactics he would have been familiar with in the early years of warfare on the Western Front. These were wholly ineffective and inappropriate against the Japanese, who used guerrilla-style tactics, sending small, mobile units to outflank and disorient the slower, more cumbersome [enemy] resulting in a crushing defeat for the Allies.

Even as British tactics evolved, the ideological divide remained stark. The Japanese were deeply influenced by the ancient Bushido code, which emphasised death before dishonour. This often led to suicidal tactics that Allied troops struggled to comprehend. At the Battle of Kangaw these cultural differences had very real and deadly consequences on the ground.

What do you hope readers will take away from your book Jungle Commandos?

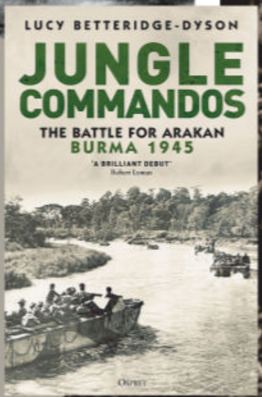
Above all, I hope readers come away with a deeper understanding of the men of XV Corps, who've largely been left out of our collective memory of the war in Burma. The story of Burma is not a sideshow, it's a central chapter in the story of the Second World War full of complexity, courage and human resilience. I also want to highlight just how international and cooperative the campaign was. Forces from across the globe – British, Indian, African, American and Chinese – came together under extraordinarily difficult circumstances. *Jungle Commandos* is just one part of that much bigger story. ○

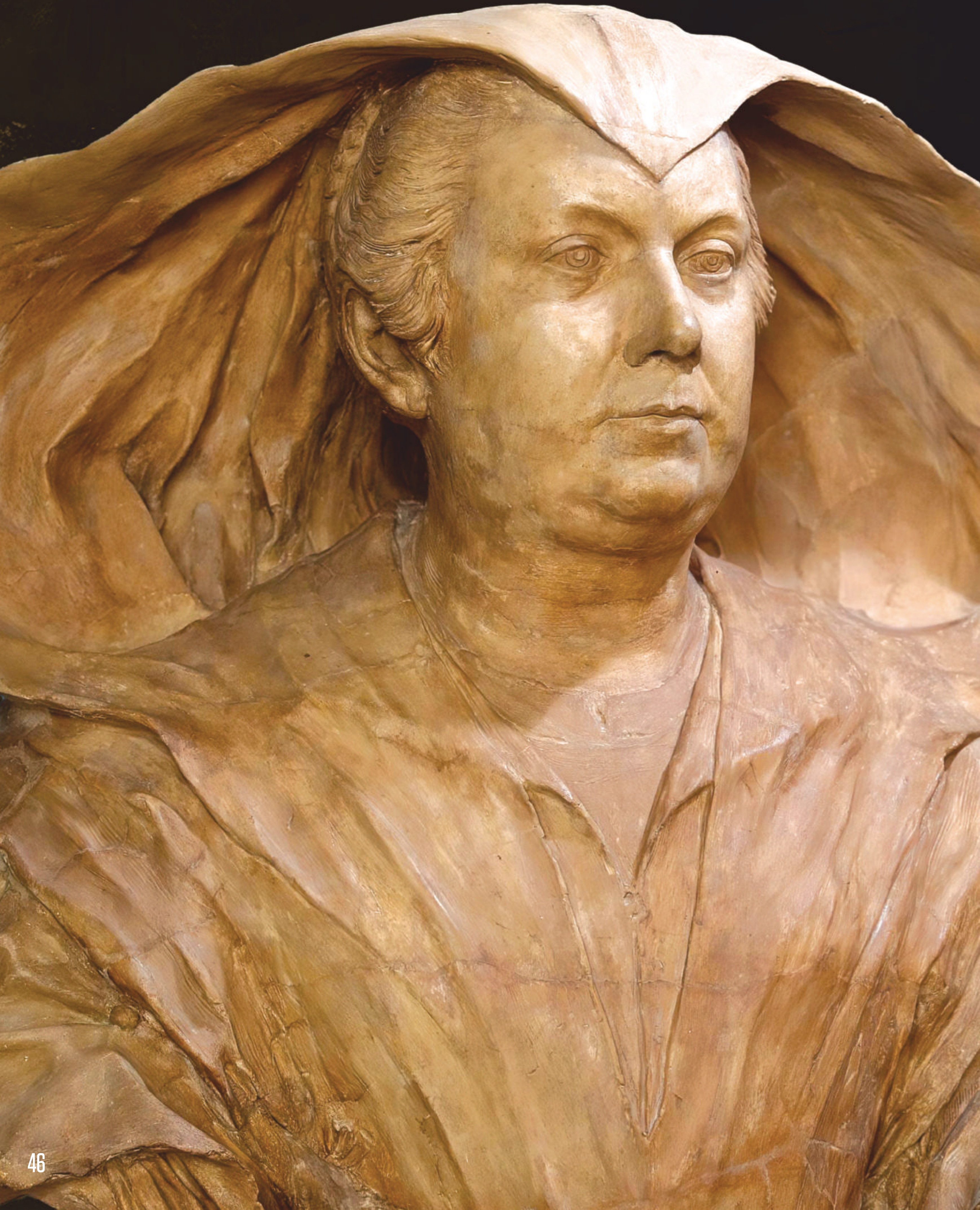
TOP The area's many rivers presented a challenging obstacle for Allied troops

MIDDLE Burma saw British, Indian, African, American and Chinese forces join together

ABOVE A Chinese soldier advances during a firefight

JUNGLE COMMANDOS: THE BATTLE FOR ARAKAN, BURMA 1945 BY LUCY BETTERIDGE-DYSON IS OUT NOW FROM OSPREY PUBLISHING





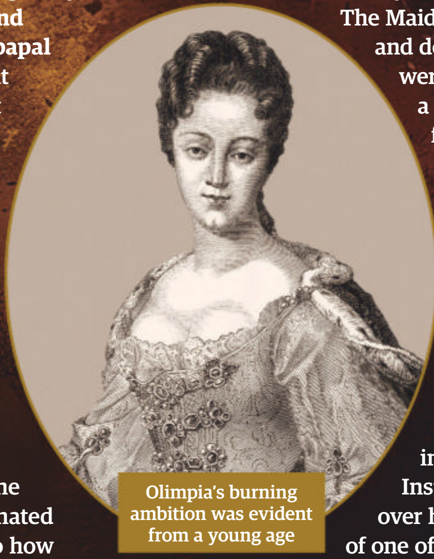
La Papessa

THE WOMAN WHO RULED THE VATICAN

How the fearsome Olimpia Maidalchini Pamphilj became the most powerful, revered and hated woman in Rome

Written by Emily Staniforth

For almost 300 years, a portrait by 17th century Spanish painter Diego Velázquez of arguably the most infamous and powerful women in papal history had been lost. In 2019, as it went up for auction at Sotheby's, it attracted international attention as the world laid their eyes on the striking face of Olimpia Maidalchini Pamphilj, the woman who dominated the halls of the Vatican for 11 years between 1644 to 1655. At the height of her influence, Olimpia was the most controversial figure in the Catholic world, yet today few people have heard her name. Such was her power that she was christened La Papessa - The Female Pope - by both those who hated her and those who admired her. So how did she become so powerful?



Olimpia's burning ambition was evident from a young age

A HEADSTRONG GIRL

Olimpia was born in 1591 in the city of Viterbo in central Italy to Sforza and Vittoria Maidalchini. The Maidalchinis were moderately wealthy and descended from nobility, but they were by no means in possession of a great fortune. As such, Olimpia's father decided to send all three of his daughters, of which Olimpia was the eldest, into religious life in a convent to save the cost of the dowries they would have required to be married. In doing so, Sforza aimed to preserve the family's financial reserves for his only son and heir.

At 16, Olimpia already knew her own mind and would not be forced into a nunnery against her will. Instead, she achieved a great victory over her father by enticing the affections of one of the richest men in Viterbo, Paolo Nini, whom she married in 1608. It seemed

All images: © Alamy

Olimpia was set for life with her wealthy husband, but after just three years of marriage he died unexpectedly, leaving her widowed and alone. However, she was now in sole command of her late husband's entire fortune.

Upon Nini's death Olimpia had only just turned 20, and as a young woman with huge wealth it was only a matter of time before she married again. But instead of finding another young husband, her ambition for power saw her marry Pamphilio Pamphilj, a somewhat confusingly named nobleman from an influential family who gave Olimpia status as well as riches. At the time of their wedding in 1612 Pamphilio was 51 – 30 years older than his new bride. After their nuptials she became known as Donna, or 'Lady', Olimpia.

BURNING AMBITION

As part of the Pamphilj family, Olimpia's prospects broadened and she began to devise a plan to increase her influence. She spotted potential in her husband's younger brother, Giovanni Battista Pamphilj, whose career in the Catholic Church had led to him working as an ecclesiastical diplomat known as a nuncio. Olimpia and the 38-year-old Giovanni formed a close bond, and the two lived together with Pamphilio in the Pamphilj family home in Rome's Piazza Navona, as well as in Naples for a time while Giovanni worked there. Giovanni was hesitant and indecisive, making him a perfect candidate for Olimpia to manoeuvre and mould. As well as influencing her brother-in-law, she set about offering bribes and making deals with people in high places to facilitate Giovanni's rise to power. In 1629 her hard work paid off and he was made a cardinal, a prominent and senior position within the Catholic Church. But Olimpia was not done yet. Despite the death of her husband Pamphilio in 1639, she maintained an iron grip on Giovanni and his career.

> "Olimpia saw her chance to wield tangible influence over the Vatican… and took it"

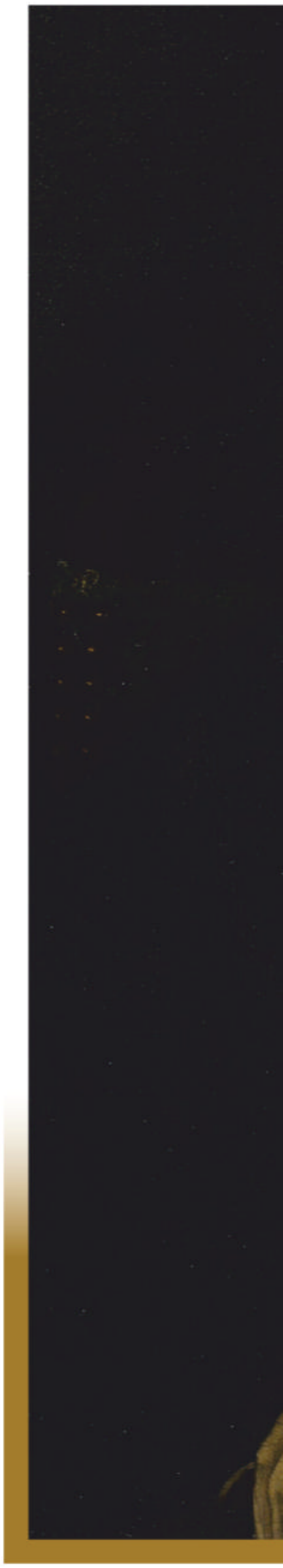
Olimpia saw her chance to wield tangible influence over the Vatican, a setting where women were (and still are) traditionally barred from power, and took it. In 1644, following the death of Pope Urban VIII, a papal conclave was held to elect a new pontiff. Inside the Sistine Chapel, cardinals were locked in a stalemate for two months as two opposing factions vied to push their candidates, without success. It's said that during this time, Olimpia used the situation to her advantage and offered a substantial bribe to a senior cardinal inside the chapel to champion Giovanni as a candidate, hoping he would serve as a compromise between the two camps.

Olimpia's plan worked and on 15 September 1644 Giovanni became Pope Innocent X. Not every cardinal was thrilled with the decision, as they already recognised the substantial influence Olimpia held over the new pontiff. France's King Louis XIV even attempted to veto Giovanni's candidacy, a right that some Catholic monarchs at the time occasionally invoked during conclave. However, the cardinal delivering the veto arrived too late and the election was finalised. Upon the investiture of Pope Innocent, one cardinal was quoted as saying: "Gentlemen, we have just elected a female pope."

MISTRESS OF THE VATICAN

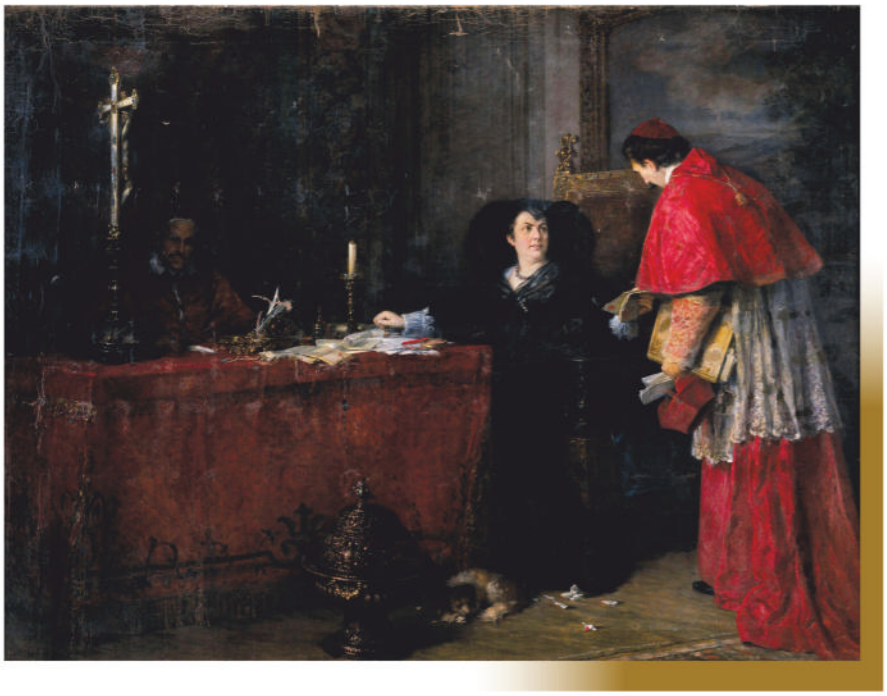
Despite the opposition of other cardinals to Olimpia's influence over the newly appointed pontiff, she did not seem to care. Neither, it appeared, did the new pope. Innocent continued to depend on Olimpia's advice, just as he had done for much of his career. But her hold on the pope extended to more than just advice. She spent her days at the Vatican attending meetings with cardinals and intervening in papal business on behalf of Innocent. For those wanting to gain an audience with the pope, they first had to contend with Olimpia, who tightly controlled access to her brother-in-law. People began referring to her as La Papessa – The Female Pope – and it was becoming increasingly clear to everyone that Olimpia was the one steering the ship. According to Eleanor Herman, author of *Mistress of the Vatican, The True Story of Olimpia Maidalchini: The Secret Female Pope*, citizens even hung banners throughout Rome that read "Pope Olimpia I".

As the woman standing between the pope and his subjects, Olimpia was courted by dignitaries and clergymen who all hoped to gain her favour and support. She was gifted valuable jewellery and accepted hefty bribes, becoming increasingly wealthy and powerful in the process. But her amoral influence extended far further, as she used her role as the pope's right-hand woman to position her relatives in places of authority. Invoking a tradition stretching back to the Middle Ages that allowed the pontiff to appoint a relative to a role in high office, Olimpia's son Camillo was granted the title of Cardinal Nephew. However, he later resigned his position in order to marry, leaving a vacancy. Despite not being related by blood, Innocent gave the Cardinal Nephew title to Olimpia's nephew Francesco Maidalchini, the son of her brother. Yet Francesco proved inadequate to the task and he was replaced by Camillo Astalli, a distant cousin by marriage to Olimpia. All three of these men were only connected to

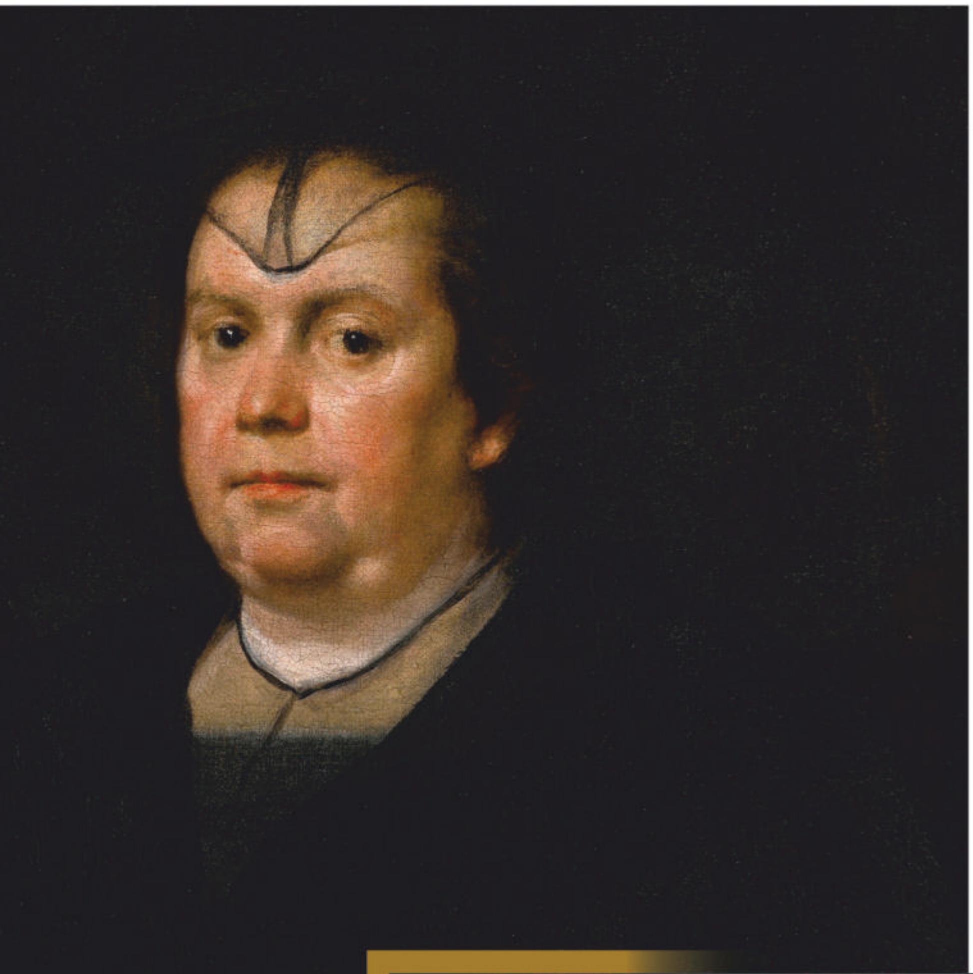


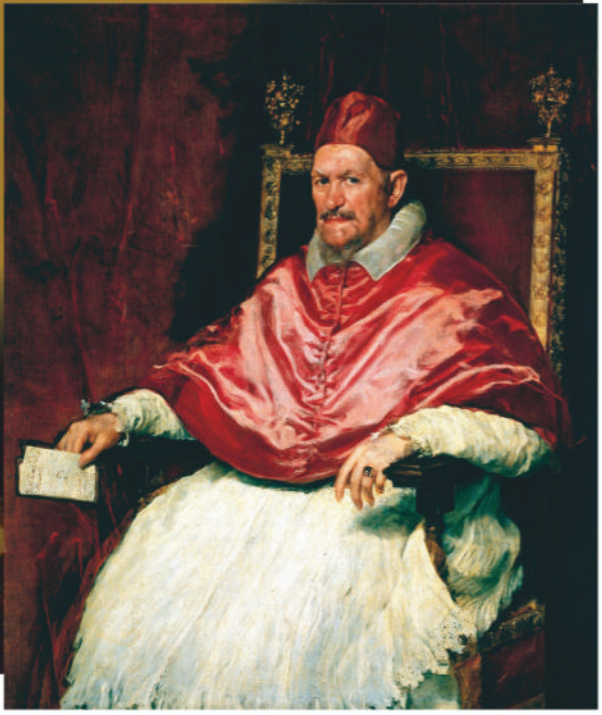
ABOVE Olimpia was referred to as La Papessa (The Female Pope) and La Pimpaccia (The Woman of Sins)

INSET Innocent X, painted by Diego Velázquez in 1649



LEFT Olimpia depicted in conversation with Innocent X





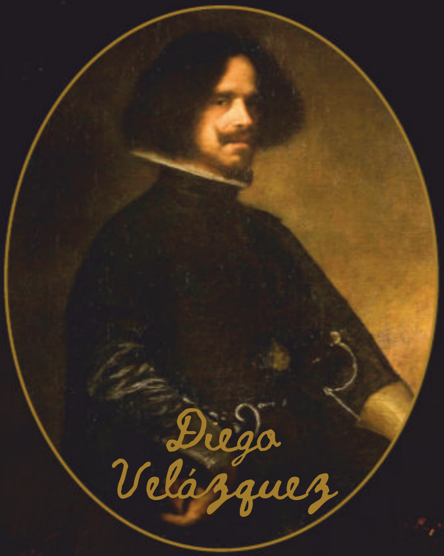
Innocent through their relationship with the nepotistic La Papessa.

Olimpia also oversaw the expensive renovation and expansion of Palazzo Pamphilj, the Pamphilj family home in the Piazza Navona in Rome where she lived for many years during her marriage to Pamphilio and during Innocent's time as pope. She commissioned Italian sculptor and architect Gian Lorenzo Bernini to complete interior work in the Church of Saint Agnes, which was situated next door to the palazzo, as well as arranging for Bernini to design the Fountain of the Four Rivers, which remains outside the palazzo to this day. Her patronage shaped Rome and her input in the city can still be seen.

A MONSTROUS POWER?

Olimpia's control of the pope and his decision-making was by no means a secret. Within the Vatican she was a formidable barrier to those who wanted access to the pope and reviled for it. Many scholars have remarked upon the fact that it was not Olimpia's greed, manipulation and

▶



A FORMIDABLE PORTRAIT

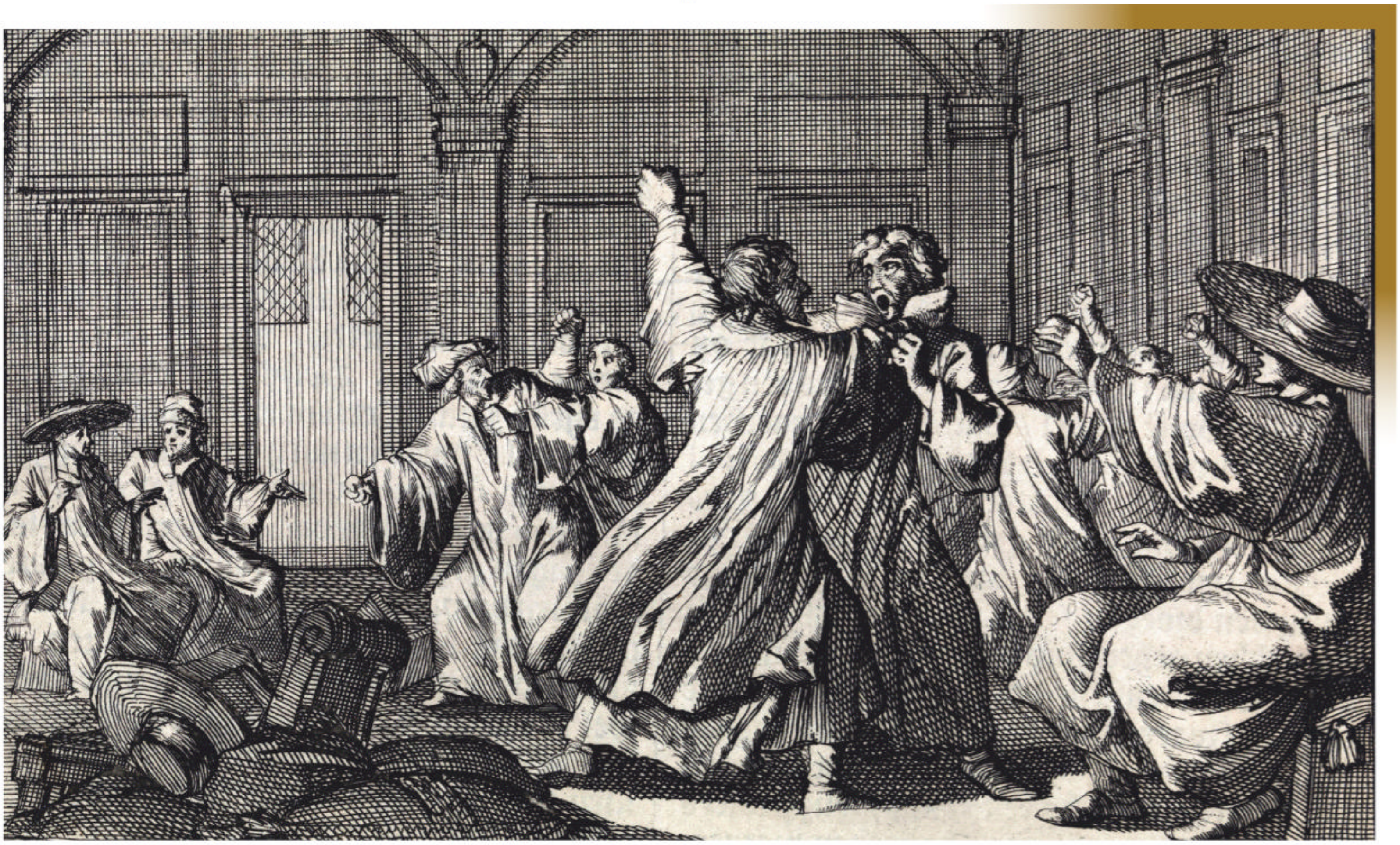
The mysterious disappearance of a Velázquez masterpiece

Spanish painter Diego Velázquez only visited Rome twice, and on one of these sojourns to the city, in 1649, he was tasked with acquiring great works of art for Spain's King Philip IV. During his trip he was also commissioned to paint a portrait of Pope Innocent X by Olimpia Maidalchini Pamphilj. The painting became one of Velázquez's most admired and famous works and today is on display at the Doria Pamphilj gallery in Rome.

In 1650, after he had completed his portrait of Innocent, Velazquez was commissioned to paint Olimpia herself. No doubt she believed that she too deserved a portrait by one of the most revered artists of the age. The painting is a striking, stark depiction of a woman who was hated and beloved in equal measure by the people of Rome, capturing her steely nature and imposing figure. Unlike Innocent's portrait, which has been a prized and preserved work ever since its creation, Olimpia's likeness disappeared some time after 1724, when it last appeared in records. Did the Vatican try to conceal the portrait of the woman they felt had humiliated the institution? Did Olimpia's descendents keep it safely hidden away? We may never know, but in the 1980s the portrait miraculously resurfaced and was acquired by Sotheby's. In July 2019, it was sold at auction for just under £3 million.

Markings on the back helped researchers authenticate the picture

All images: © Alamy; © Getty Images



ABOVE The conclave that elected Pope Innocent X was a long and contentious affair

corruption that offended them, but the fact that she was a woman who was overstepping the boundaries of her sex. She was described as a "monstrous power" and a "witch" within the Vatican by the men who hated her.

Other insults were hurled at Olimpia by her detractors, such as whispered rumours of an illicit relationship between her and Pope Innocent that spread throughout the city. Although no evidence of any such affair has ever been uncovered, Olimpia was referred to by some as La Pimpaccia, meaning The Woman of Sin. She was also ridiculed through the use of her own name by splitting it in half to read 'olim pia', which translates as 'once pious'.

"Olimpia fled with all the gold she had stolen"

BELOW The Palazzo Pamphilj, now the home of the Brazilian Embassy, on the left side of the Piazza Navona

Yet not everyone hated her. On the contrary, many women in the Catholic world appeared to have been in awe of the cunning woman who had climbed to the top of arguably the most powerful institution in the Western world. According to Herman in a piece written for Sotheby's: "Olimpia was a baroque rock star to the women of her time who came from all over Catholic Europe to stand outside her palace and cheer as her carriage rolled out. They could not believe that a female from modest beginnings had risen to such heights of power in a man's world."

Despite Olimpia's obvious lust for wealth and power, the women of Rome recognised a softer side of La Papessa. Using her position of incredible power and status, she made sure to champion women from all walks of life. She donated money to support convents and provided dowries for young women who, like her as a teenager, wished to marry rather than be compelled into a nunnery. Olimpia was also famous for her kindness towards Rome's prostitutes, granting them protection by letting them use her carriages and display her coat of arms. This association with sex workers did little to change the opinions of those who referred to her as La Pimpaccia, but it has resulted in some historians considering her to be an early feminist.

THE DOWNFALL

The power afforded to Olimpia from 1644 could only last for so long and depended entirely on Pope Innocent. Throughout his papal reign he'd only once bowed to external pressure and sent Olimpia away from the Vatican, but he quickly backtracked on this decision after realising he needed her. However, it became apparent to Olimpia in 1654 that her time at the top was coming to an end when Innocent, now 80, fell seriously ill. Confined to his bed, Olimpia continued to manipulate him in his final days to protect the level of wealth to which she had become accustomed. Convincing Innocent to have the papal gold reserves moved from the treasury to his bedroom, Olimpia began squirrelling away as much as she could get her hands on in preparation for the inevitable.

On 7 January 1655, Pope Innocent X died. Customarily the pope's closest family members were responsible for paying for a funeral and burial fit for a man of such power and status. This responsibility, of course, fell to Olimpia who, despite having spent the past weeks lining her pockets with Vatican gold, claimed she could not afford to finance the interment. As a result, Innocent's body was unceremoniously placed in a cupboard in St Peter's Basilica, where it was left to rot. Eventually one of Innocent's servants footed the bill for a simple coffin so he could be laid to rest with some dignity.

Following a lengthy conclave, Pope Alexander VII was elected in April 1656. Having served in the Vatican as Pope Innocent's secretary of state, he was well aware of Olimpia and did not care for her. He began to compile evidence of her corruption and pilfering in order to bring charges against her, but first exiled her from Rome while the case was built. Olimpia fled with the gold she had stolen and retreated to her hometown of Viterbo, where she awaited the outcome of Alexander's investigation.

Later that year bubonic plague rampaged through Italy, killing vast swathes of the population. As a result the investigation into Olimpia was put on hold – but it would never be resumed. The following year she contracted the deadly disease and died on 26 September 1657, never facing the repercussions of her scandalous, mercenary behaviour.

FAMOUS BUT FORGOTTEN

Following her fall from grace and death, Olimpia was not commemorated in any way by the Catholic Church. In fact, it actively attempted to wipe out all trace of her and her corrupting influence on Innocent. Olimpia had humiliated the Church and the traditions and rules it had operated under for centuries, inserting herself into the upper echelons of an ancient institution that has never accepted female involvement. In doing so, she exceeded the expectations of what women of her era could achieve. She was wily, avaricious, ambitious, deceitful and headstrong – a complex and divisive woman who was seen as evil yet also impressive. She was a woman who would not take no for an answer and refused to be constrained by the powerful men around her. But the Catholic Church could not allow her legacy to tarnish its image and she was eradicated from its history.

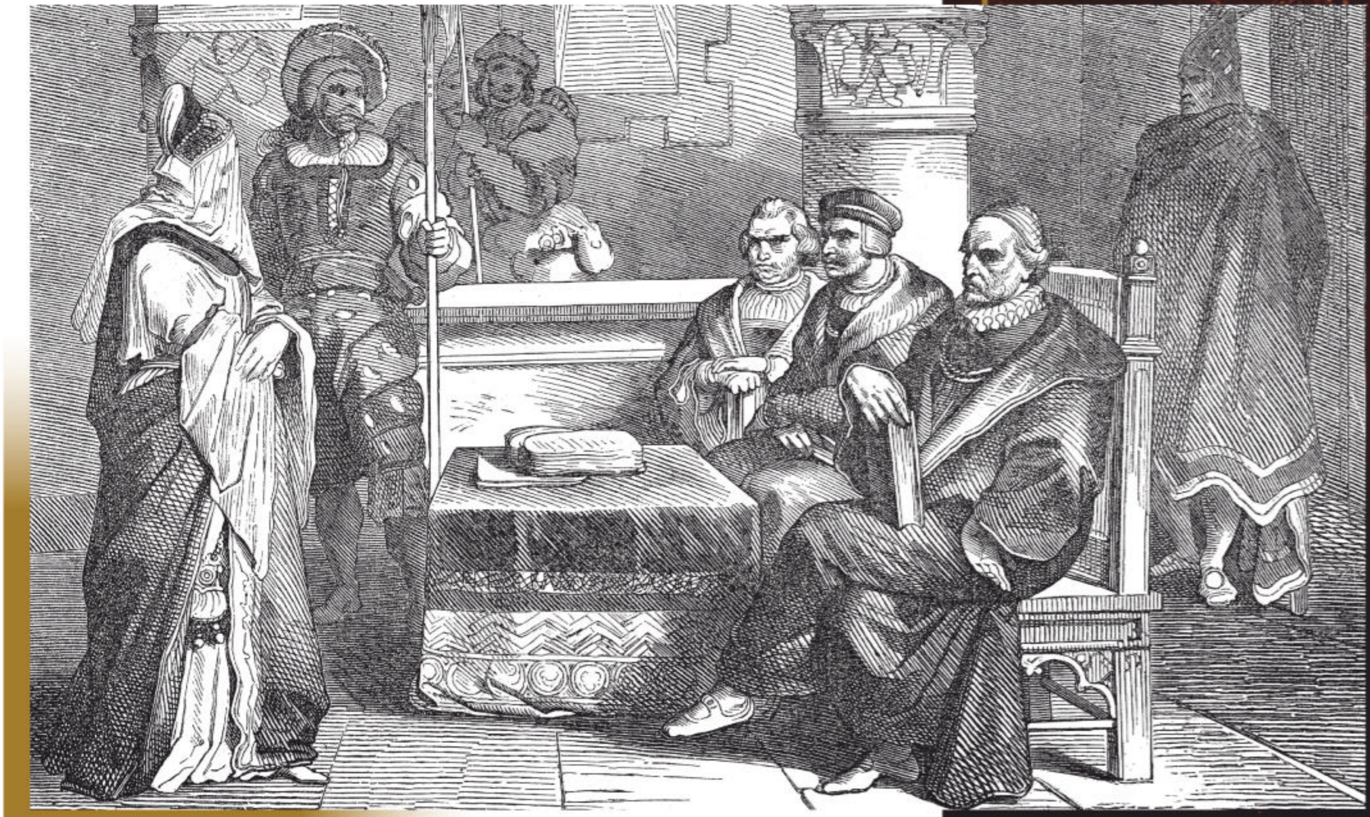
Today, with the rediscovery of Velázquez's intriguing lost portrait and the work of dedicated historians resurrecting her memory, her life is being brought out of the shadows. It's clear why Olimpia Maidalchini Pamphilj has been described as "the most famous forgotten woman of all time." ○

THE PHANTOM OF LA PAPESSA

The ghost of Olimpia still haunts the streets of Rome

After the death of Pope Innocent X in 1655, Olimpia Maidalchini Pamphilj soon fled Rome and returned to her hometown Viterbo, where she lived out the last year of her life. Yet some citizens of the Eternal City believe La Papessa never truly left.

Every year on the night of 7 January, the anniversary of Pope Innocent's death and the day upon which Olimpia lost her position of power and status, her spirit is said to return to terrorise the dark streets. Legend has it that on this night Olimpia can be seen dressed all in black, as if in mourning, seated in the back of a dark burning carriage being drawn by black horses. The carriage careers wildly from the Piazza Navona and across the Ponte Sisto bridge, as if she is once again fleeing the city. It's said that her spectre can be heard laughing as she takes flight with her stolen treasures. If the Vatican intended to destroy La Papessa's memory, it clearly didn't take into account that in the afterlife she would be just as formidable as she had been when she was alive.



LEFT A depiction of the disgraced Olimpia being questioned by cardinals after the death of Pope Innocent X

All images: © Alamy, © Getty Images

THE EARTHS

The empire of the Inca began small, eventually growing to encompass a vast area containing numerous peoples. Starting with the city of Cusco, nestled in an upland Andean valley in modern Peru, the Inca expanded relentlessly from their home base until they had become masters of a gigantic realm. They called their state Tawantinsuyu, meaning 'the Land of the Four Quarters' in their native language of Quechua. It was an appropriate moniker, as it came to stretch from Quito in modern-day Ecuador in the north to the Rio Maule in modern Chile in the south and embraced large portions of what are today sections of Peru, Argentina and Bolivia. Its population would reach approximately 10 million.

The Inca themselves were not barbarians who left only destruction in their wake. They established a sophisticated system of administration for a state that was connected by well-maintained roads. Tawantinsuyu would become the biggest polity in the Americas in the years prior to Columbus.

The lion's share of the credit for the building of Tawantinsuyu must go to the ninth Inca

© Shutterstock

INCA SHAKER

Pachacuti, the ninth Inca monarch, expanded the empire's boundaries and forged a cohesive, tightly governed state

Written by Marc DeSantis

leader, Yupanqui, better known to history by his throne name of Pachacuti – Earthshaker. The name was entirely justified, as Pachacuti would indeed shake the whole of the Andean world when he came to power in the early 15th century.

AN INCA PRINCE

The origins of the Inca can be traced back to approximately two centuries before Pachacuti, to around the year 1200. They were an Andean mountain people who held that their city, Cusco, had been built by their first monarch, Manco Cápac. One of the leading deities of the Inca was the Sun god Inti, who would play a leading role in the foundation of Tawantinsuyu.

Inca tradition held that Inti showed himself one day to the young Yupanqui (c.1418–1471) when he was still a prince and not even in the direct royal succession to the throne. His brother Urco had previously been gifted with the honour of being named heir by their ▶

father, Viracocha Inca, the ruler of the Inca kingdom. Urco was for all intents and purposes the junior king. Yupanqui's vision of Inti was so startling – Inti's arms were wrapped round with snakes – that he ran from the god in fear. Inti called to him and told him that he would one day conquer many nations. The god then proceeded to reveal to Yupanqui the many places that would fall to him in the future by means of a magic mirror.

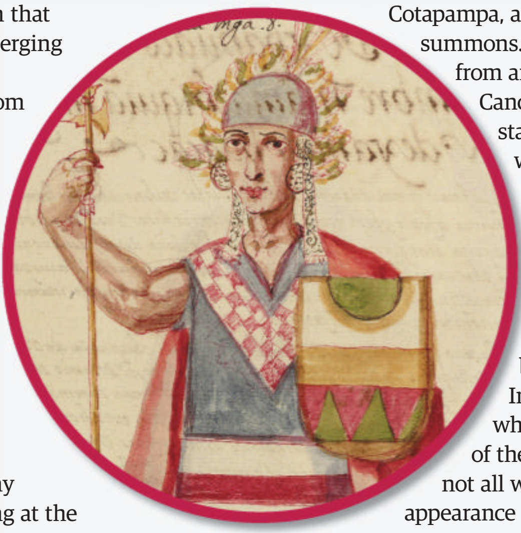
Notwithstanding the revelation, Yupanqui's immediate succession prospects remained remote – but that would soon change. Urco, perhaps the victim of Yupanqui's own subsequent propaganda, was said to show little interest in governing, instead devoting his attention to a harem of women. Urco, though in line to inherit, was not worthy of his position as heir to the empire. Shirking his duties, he made his brother Yupanqui responsible for overseeing Cusco while he left to immerse himself in more pleasant undertakings. By this time their father Viracocha had stepped back from his royal duties and left Urco in charge of the capital. He was now spending his days in the steep fortress of Pisac located in the nearby Sacred Valley (the Urubamba River Valley).

The sloth of Urco, leaving Cusco rudderless, dismayed several of the Incas' leading generals. These warriors wanted to conquer the lands around Cusco, and Urco's disinterest did not sit well with them. A conspiracy of around 20 formed among these generals to depose him. With both co-kings gone from Cusco, there would be relatively little to stop them.

However, this did not mean that there would be no threats emerging from the outside. The Chanca were hostile mountaineers from the region of Choclococha. They were neighbours of the Quechua (the Inca were themselves a Quechua-speaking people) and were expanding their territory in the early 15th century. The success of the Chanca, which included a resounding victory over the Quechua, brought them within striking distance of Cusco.

In 1438, a large Chanca army moved against Cusco, stopping at the Pass of Vilcaconga to call for the Inca to surrender. Both Viracocha and Urco hurried back to Cusco, but stayed only long enough to arrange a wholesale, and deeply embarrassing, evacuation to the Yucay Valley.

With this crisis breaking, the coup plotters had to move. Either they would leave with the co-kings and share in their fate, or they could put forward their own candidate and seek outright victory. Selecting the latter course, the man they chose as their leader was Yupanqui.

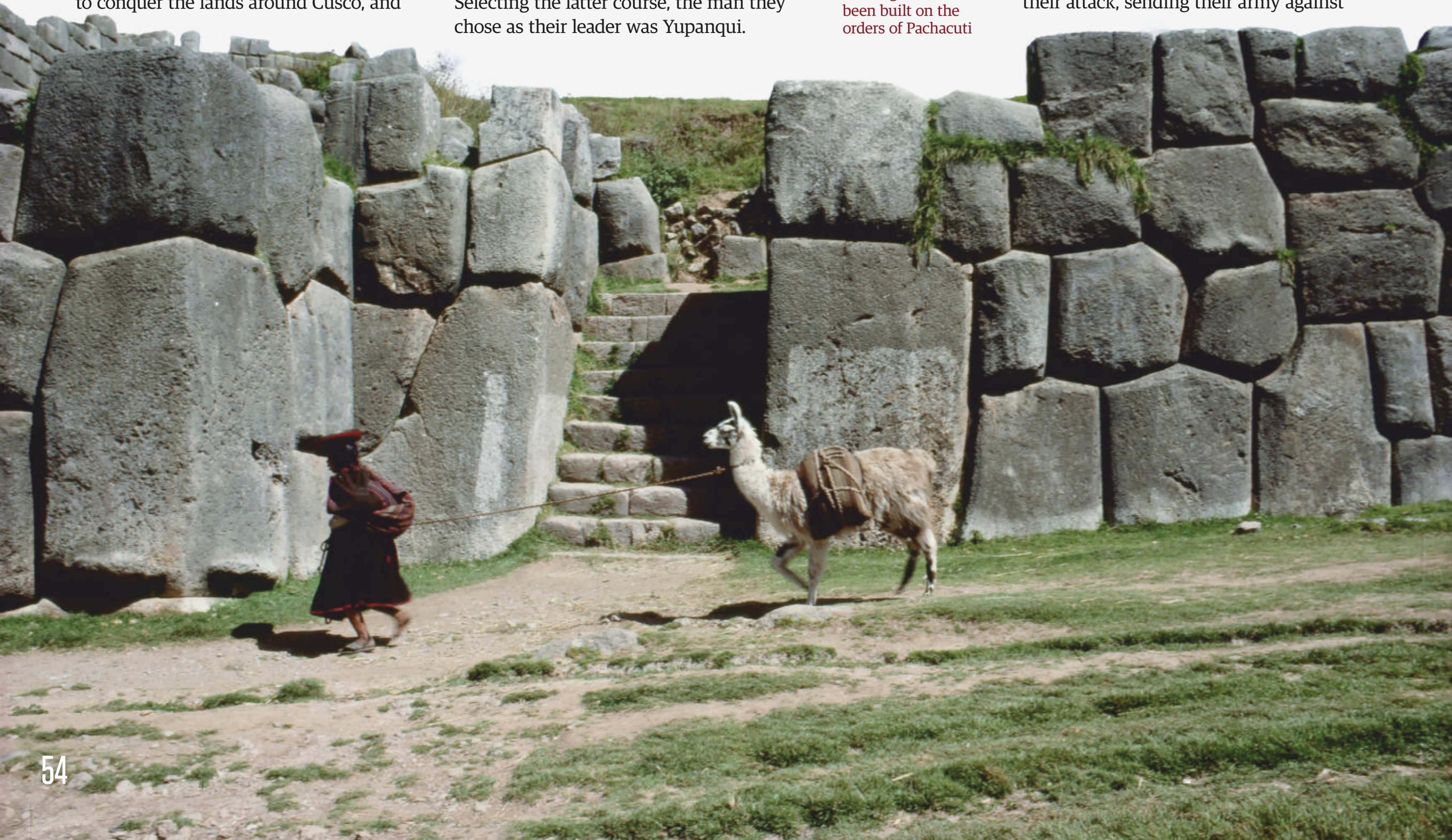


ABOVE Viracocha, the eighth Inca ruler, was deposed in 1438 by Pachacuti

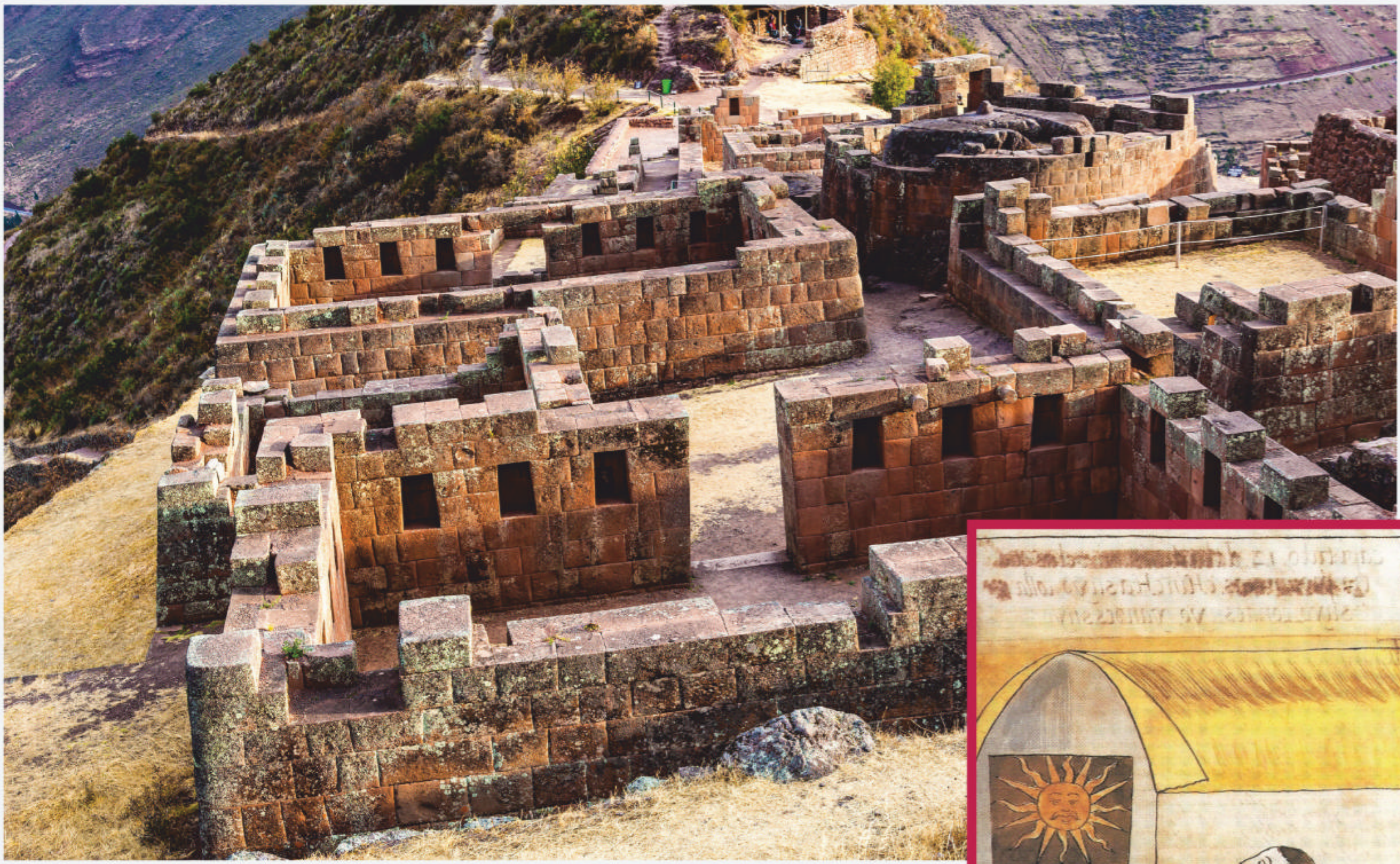
Desperate for more soldiers, Yupanqui cast around, seeking them wherever he could find them. Other peoples also threatened by the Chanca expansion, such as the Quechua, the Aymara and Cotapampa, answered the prince's summons. Mercenaries, too, were hired from among the Cana and the Cancha. The army that would stand with Yupanqui at Cusco was thus a hastily organised collection of disparate forces with only a slight prospect of success. Meanwhile, the fierce Chanca army closed in on Cusco.

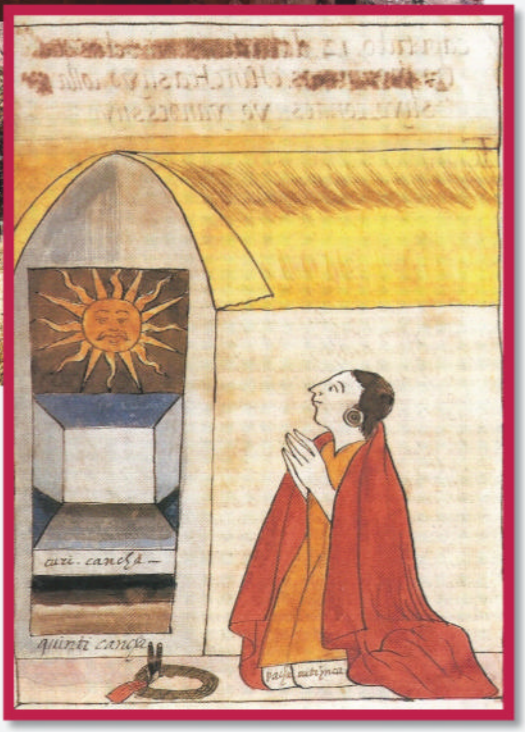
The Chanca assault soon began in earnest, but the Inca received early warning when a spy brought them news of their movement. Nonetheless, not all were steeled against the appearance of the Chanca – when the enemy arrived some of the inhabitants fled in fear and headed for the mountains.

Others, however, remained to stand at the side of their resolute commander. Instead of taking refuge inside the fort above Cusco, Yupanqui met the Chanca in the field: he would not abandon the city as had his father and brother. The first day's battle was indecisive, but Yupanqui received some reinforcements. The second morning saw the Chanca renew their attack, sending their army against



BELOW The fortress Sacsayhuamán, near the capital Cusco, is thought to have been built on the orders of Pachacuti





ABOVE The fortress of Pisac in the Sacred Valley

RIGHT Pachacuti worships Inti, the Inca Sun god

the beleaguered city garrison. Wearing about his shoulders the skin of a puma, a creature revered among the Inca for its ferocious power, Yupanqui led his soldiers into combat in person. What ensued was a frightful battle, with so much blood spilled that the Inca came to call it the Yahuar Pampa: the Field of Blood.

At some point, the Chanca were gripped by panic. Perhaps they had lost all hope of overcoming Yupanqui and his warriors. Whatever the cause, they were the ones to flee, with the Inca in hot pursuit. During a chase that went on for nine gore-stained kilometres, the Chanca were slaughtered down to the last man.

Yupanqui was the saviour of Cusco. In time, he would inflict another shattering defeat on the Chanca at Ichupampa, thereby crippling their power. More immediately, he still had to deal with his father and brother in their hideaway rump state in the Yucay Valley. His record in the defence of the kingdom was undeniably far superior to those of his father and brother, and he had earned his peoples' adoration. Urco was labelled an outlaw, and he eventually died while fighting against Yupanqui's loyalists.

The victorious prince compelled Viracocha to give up the throne and took the kingship for himself, becoming the ninth Inca ruler. It was at his coronation that he took his throne name of Pachacuti, meaning the Earthshaker. Viracocha was publicly humiliated by being made to drink Chicha (an Inca beverage created by the chewing of maize kernels, with the resulting mash then allowed to ferment) from a dirty pot used to hold excrement. With his feckless father's dignity stripped away, Pachacuti was now the unchallenged ruler.

> "INSTEAD OF TAKING REFUGE INSIDE THE FORT ABOVE CUSCO, YUPANQUI MET THE CHANCA IN THE FIELD: HE WOULD NOT ABANDON THE CITY"

EXPANDING THE EMPIRE

Pachacuti would not rest content with the assumption of the kingship. In line with Inti's vision, he embarked upon a series of military campaigns that ultimately pushed the boundaries of the Inca Empire further north into the Andean highlands of Peru and into the south to the shores of Lake Titicaca, which today lies on the border between Peru and Bolivia.

Pachacuti's campaigns were to take on a different character from those of his predecessors. The latter had been more used to unleashing raids that involved the taking of loot and ended with a return to the Inca homeland. Now, war would be conducted for more than the acquisition of mere goods: it would enable permanent ▶

All images: © Alamy, © Getty Images, © Shutterstock

expansion. Pachacuti would also extend the sway of Inca culture, something that was in keeping with the practices of many empires elsewhere in the world. This would serve to bind other peoples more closely to the Inca.

To ease the way for his conquests, Pachacuti could be both frightening as well as conciliatory. He knew how useful terror was as a tool to compel his opponents to submit. Yet he heightened the allure of a peaceful surrender by granting gifts and honours to foreign enemies who willingly accepted him as their overlord. Again, this policy was in line with pragmatic imperial practices deployed elsewhere in the world.

RULING THE EMPIRE

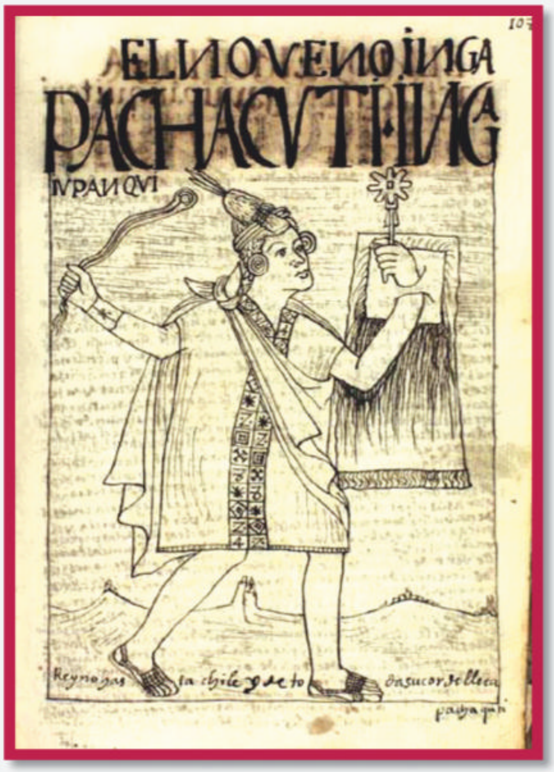
Pachacuti understood that governing an empire was a task just as weighty as that of winning it, and in 1463 he relinquished command of the Inca armies in favour of his son Topa Inca so he could direct all of his energies into imperial governance.

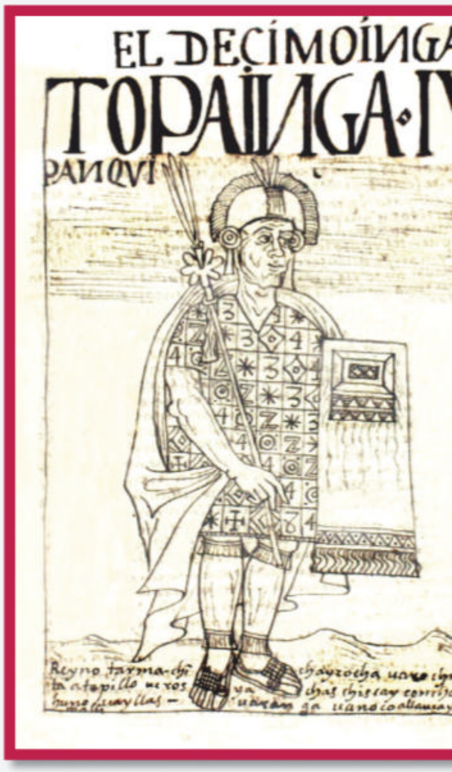
Preventing uprisings was vital in a state that contained so many newly conquered peoples who would have easily remembered the days of their independence. To forestall rebellion, Pachacuti's cultural policy was one of accommodation. Defeated nations would keep their deities, and in return he demanded that they include the worship of Inti in their own religious practices.

Pachacuti's policies were not all pleasant, however. He made use of mass deportations, as many other empires did before and after, to move potentially defiant peoples to other areas of the empire where they could, in theory, do less harm. Into their vacated homelands Pachacuti subsequently put new, loyal inhabitants. These arrivals were sometimes also expected to assist in policing these lands and could be charged with frontier defence.

Pachacuti was himself deemed partly divine given that he claimed descent from Inti. He certainly travelled in grand style, as befitted such an absolute monarch. He was borne about in a golden litter to emphasise his superiority and the distance between him and even his mightiest subjects. Those who approached him had to do so barefoot, with their eyes averted. All who came close to him also had to bear a small burden of some kind on their backs as a sign of respect for the Inca emperor.

Like all other empires, that of the Inca insisted on the payment of taxes by their subjects. Every area of the empire was subject to a yearly census, and this determined the amount of tax due. Since the Inca did not have a monetary economy, taxes were paid in kind - that is, by the provision of goods and services by the people. All of the land of the empire, and everything on it, was apportioned into thirds. The people would tend one-third for their own personal benefit; the second was tended for the Inca monarch; and the final part was worked on behalf





FORTS OF TAWANTINSUYU

The Inca guarded the heartland of their growing empire with several large, sophisticated strongpoints

◆

The Inca Empire was a huge entity, encompassing approximately three million square kilometres and containing around 10 million inhabitants. The task of securing this empire, which the Inca themselves called Tawantinsuyu, was a formidable one. Ruling from their capital city of Cusco, the Inca relied on a system of fortifications, knit together by a roadway network of some 30,000 kilometres in length, to control their enormous domain.

Among the most important fortresses protecting the core Inca lands was the one that stood at Sacsayhuamán. Said to have been built on the orders of the ninth Inca ruler, Pachacuti, it was most likely the biggest of the Inca forts. It lay in close proximity to Cusco, and was constructed of large, cyclopean (irregular-shaped) stones. Set atop a round, steep-sided hill, the fortress had three tall towers and three zigzagging multi-level defensive terraces. The Spaniards who conquered the Inca Empire in the 16th century, themselves experts in fortifications, were extremely impressed by it.

Elsewhere, in the Sacred Valley, which was of prime strategic value to the Inca, were positioned two other grand fortifications. At one end, about 60km away from Cusco, rose Pisac. This fort stood sentinel over a gorge astride the Vilcanota River (a section of the Urubamba River) and was more accurately a collection of structures, including towers, defensive terraces, barracks and other buildings standing guard over the gorge.

At the other end of the Sacred Valley, about 74km from Cusco, was Ollantaytambo. Like Pisac, it was protected by defensive terraces, of which there were 11. High walls were raised on Ollantaytambo's northwest face where its natural defences were lacking.

Machu Picchu, some 112km from Cusco, guarded the Urubamba River Valley from the top of a lofty mountain. Like Pisac and Ollantaytambo, it too was given defensive terraces and walls, as well as a dry moat. Machu Picchu is notable for having been 'lost' for centuries. It is conjectured that it may have been constructed by Pachacuti himself, and also that it was abandoned as the tide of Inca conquests rendered its strategic importance obsolete. The fortress was rediscovered in 1911.

of the gods, with the priesthoods taking possession of the produce. Personal property was limited in scope to items such as tools, clothing and jewellery.

The common people did not toil and pay tax for no benefit to themselves. Food security, always precarious in a pre-industrial, agricultural society, was enhanced by the creation of storehouses, known as qollqas, in provincial cities. Into these qollqas went a portion of the annual harvest. Poor widows, the sick, orphans and others in need could obtain food from them.

> “UNDER INCA LAW, THE PENALTIES FOR TRANSGRESSIONS COULD BE QUITE DIRE. AN EYE MIGHT BE REMOVED FOR THE OFFENCE OF TREASON, IF DEATH ITSELF WAS NOT METED OUT”

To slow the spread of luxury, which he thought was a sure step on the road to corruption for his subjects, Pachacuti forbade the wearing of feathered ornaments or garments made from vicuna wool, and restricted his people to the consumption of the beverage chicha. In compensation, Pachacuti allowed his subjects three days of holiday celebrations with the coming of the new Moon.

His legal measures were designed to ensure that lawbreaking, no matter how trivial the offence, would be punished. He was so intent on ensuring this, and also that an accused person would be given his due rights during the implementation of justice, that he would occasionally intervene himself to make certain this was done. He also set down the specific penalties that would be administered for each kind of crime.

Under Inca law, the penalties for transgressions could be quite dire. An eye might be removed for the offence of treason, if death itself was not meted out. Adulterers might be tortured or even stoned to death, and theft was a capital offence. Sloth could also be an offence, punishable by whipping or perhaps even execution.

The emperor also took a deep interest in economic matters and his primary goal was to encourage increased food production. However, now that Tawantinsuyu had come to embrace so many peoples speaking different languages, it proved difficult to administer, even for dedicated Inca officials. There was therefore unavoidable miscommunication between the officials and the common farmers, who spoke myriad tongues.

Pachacuti's solution to this problem was to give his empire a standard language - his own - Quechua, so that its inhabitants could communicate with one another more readily. To enhance the spread of Quechua, he dispatched native Quechua-speakers into his empire's provinces with two aims: learn the local languages while at the same time instructing the local peoples in the use of the Quechuan language.

FINAL DAYS

No one lives forever, not even an Inca emperor. Pachacuti died in 1471, leaving his son Topa Inca to guide the empire. Topa would expand the empire even further afield than had his mighty father, and Tawantinsuyu would stand as the greatest state in the Americas until the arrival of the Spanish in the 16th century.

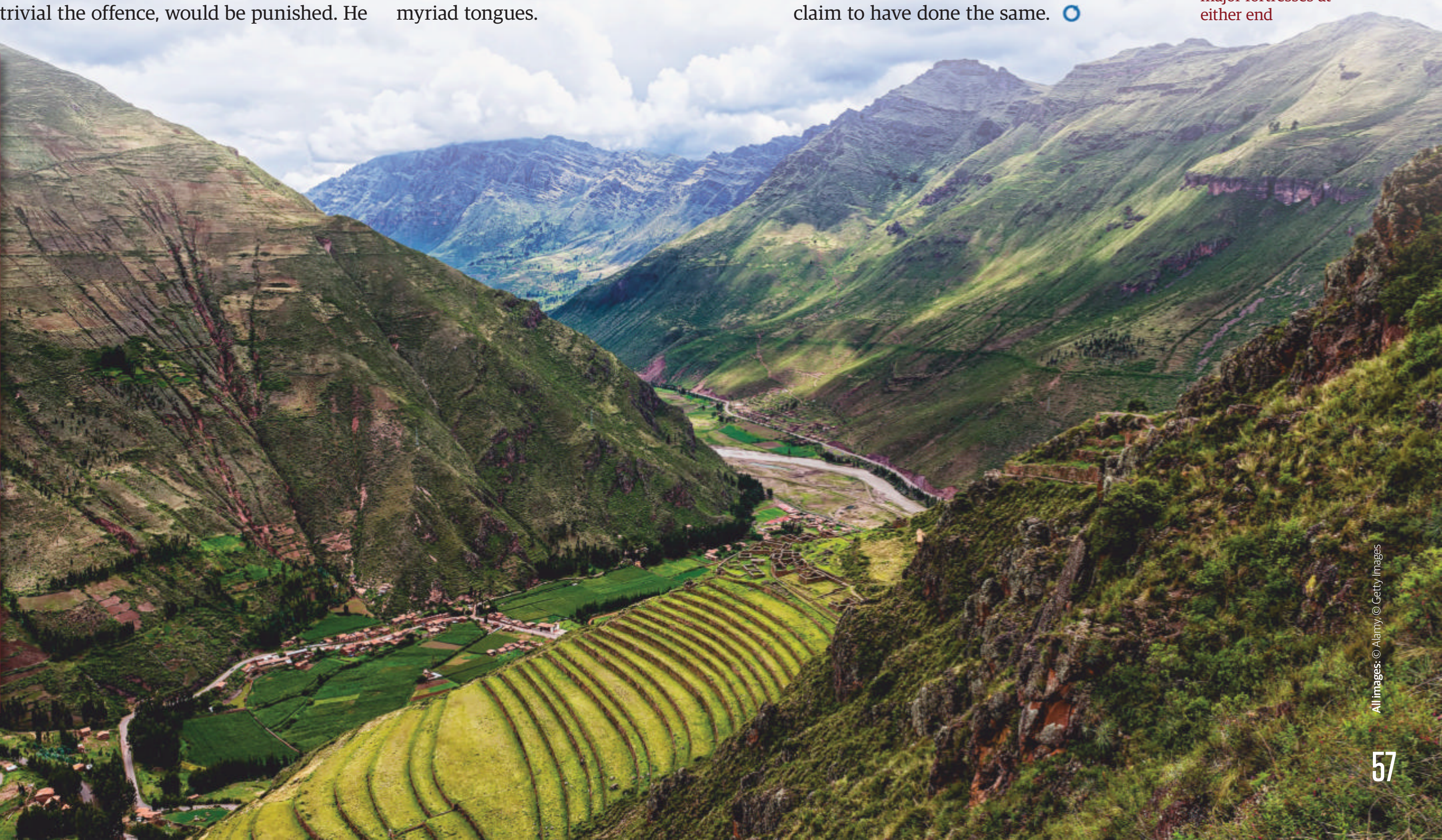
As the Inca did not make use of a system of writing, the history we have of Pachacuti derives mainly from Inca oral tradition and stories later recorded by the Spaniards who occupied his former lands. As a result, the accuracy of the many tales concerning Pachacuti and his activities are difficult to assess.

Nonetheless, it's clear that Pachacuti's achievements were immense and that he deserves to be ranked among the world's greatest monarchs. The Earthshaker left behind him a state that was vast, powerful and carefully governed. Few rulers throughout history could ever claim to have done the same. ○

BELOW-LEFT A 17th-century depiction of the ninth Inca ruler, Pachacuti - the Earthshaker

BELOW-MIDDLE Topa Inca, Pachacuti's successor, continued his father's run of imperial conquests across the Andean region

BELOW-RIGHT The Sacred Valley was a hugely important route into and out of the Cusco region and was guarded by major fortresses at either end



All images: © Alamy © Getty Images

Marie Laveau

The Voodoo Queen

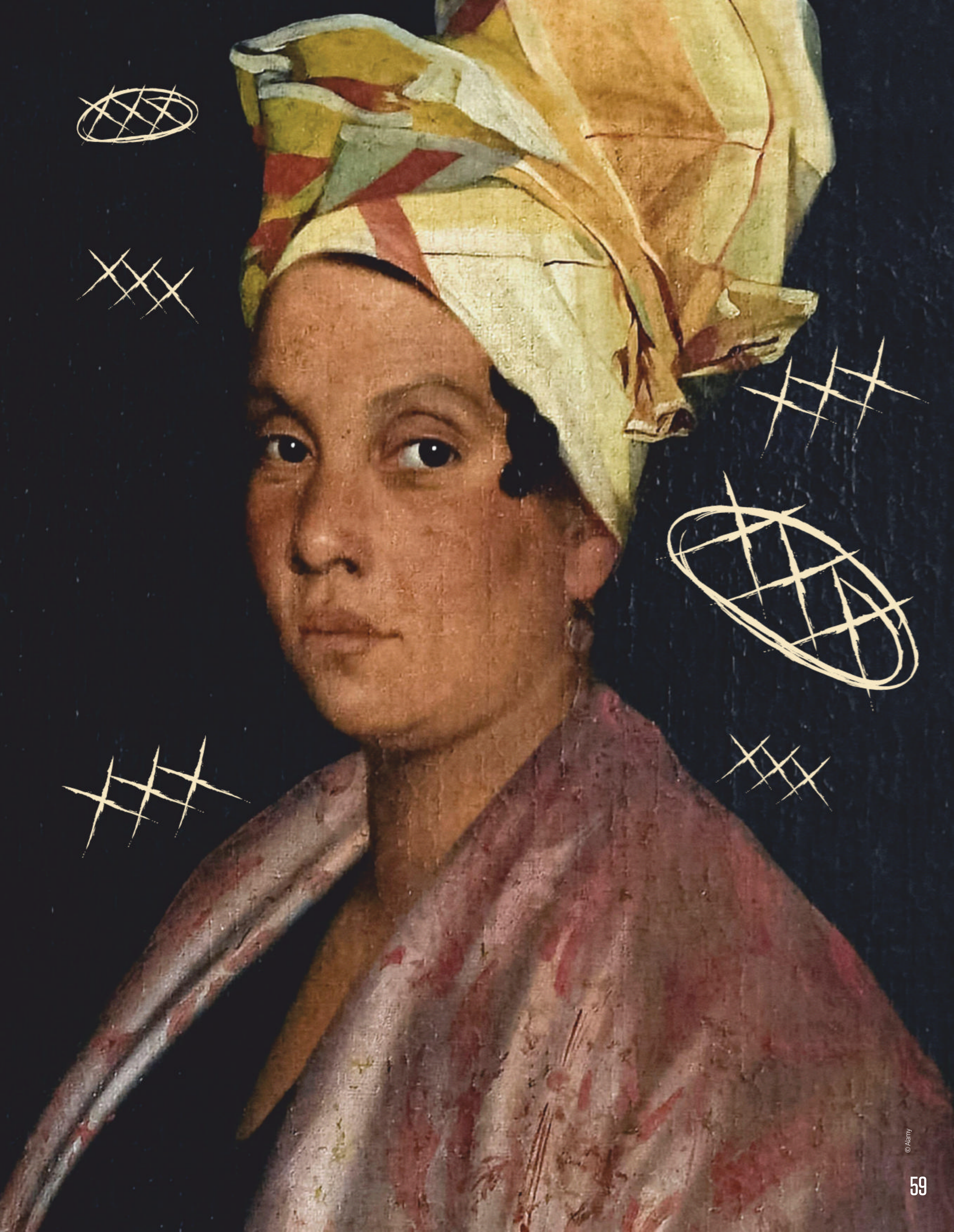
New Orleans' most famous daughter reigned over the city for decades, with both rich and poor seeking her mystic counsel

Written by Martyn Conterio

Marie Laveau wasn't just born in New Orleans; during the syncretic religion of voodoo's heyday between the 1820s and 1860s she *was* New Orleans. No other citizen in the port city's 300-year existence has so represented the unique and mysterious vibe of the town, nor gripped the public's imagination the same way.

Although her biography is littered with contradictions and codswallop due to a lack of verifiable information, this has only served to keep the flame of Laveau burning in the Big Easy. So much of her life story is wrapped up in legend, fabrication and the unknowable that even her birth year is disputed. Generally given as either 1794 or 1801, *The New York Times*' 1881 obituary marked her age at death as 98, meaning she must have been born way back in 1783 (10 September is recognised as the day of Laveau's birthday).

The doyenne of voodoo is an important icon of the Crescent City. Her family tomb is visited by throngs of people led by tour guides, tributes are left at her gravesite and the reputed location of her ramshackle cottage at



© Alamy

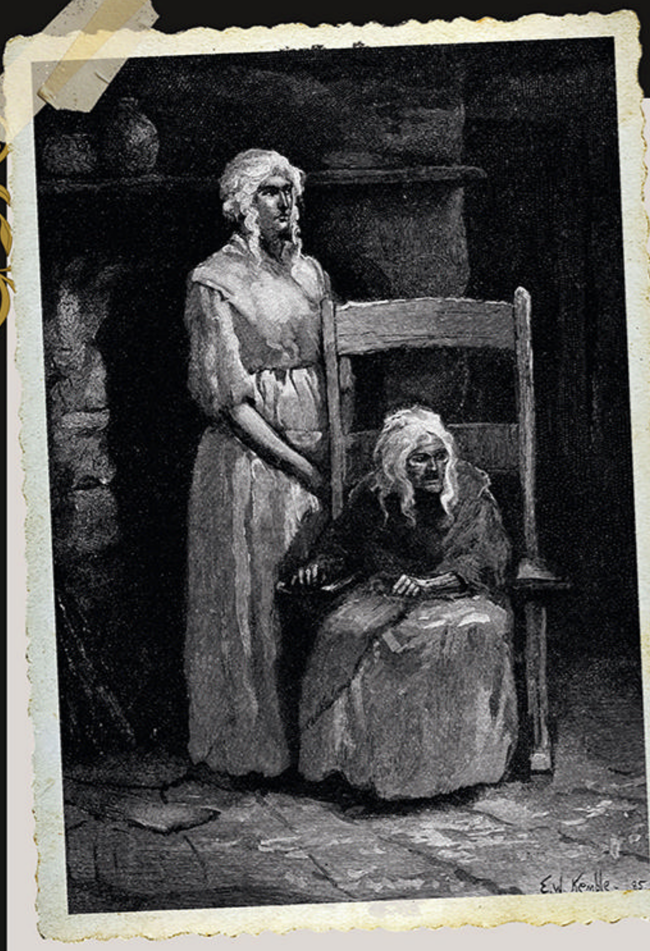
Li Grand Zombi Ritual

Laveau imbued her followers with 'snake power'

Li Grand Zombi came to prominence during the reign of Marie Laveau and is a major figure of veneration in Louisiana voodoo. Li Grand Zombi is also said to have been the name of Laveau's pet snake (described as either a boa constrictor or ball python – the latter being the more likely), which she thought would add to the theatre of her ceremony. The serpent took part in one of her famous dancing rituals, held every year on St John's Eve (23 June) in the local bayous or on the shoreline of the nearby Lake Pontchartrain in Louisiana.

Laveau would take Li Grand Zombi out of its box and let it lick her face (from which she drew power), then she would pass on the snake's 'energy' to her followers. Voodooists would then throw offerings into a cooking pot – anything from food to animals – as Laveau chanted: "L'appe vini, le Grand Zombi, L'appe vini, pou fe gris-gris!" ("He is coming, the great zombie, he is coming to make gris-gris charms!"). On other occasions she would declare: "L'appe vini, pou fair mourir!" ("He is coming to kill!"). A male participant in the ritual would then hand a small coffin to Laveau and the contents of the boiling cauldron would be passed around and supped.

BELOW In voodoo the serpent is a holy creature, the reverse of Christianity's teaching about snakes



ABOVE An 1886 engraving of the elderly voodoo queen Marie Laveau

Rue St Ann, in the French Quarter, a humble abode built by early settlers, is commemorated with a plaque. How Laveau rose to prominence is a fascinating, albeit murky confluence of religion, race, class, society and power.

Born to a white man named Charles Laveau (a Creole plantation owner) and his mixed-race mistress, Marguerite Darcantel, said to be Choctaw Native American and African, Marie grew up uneducated but free from the horrors of slavery. The famous 1835 portrait of the voodoo queen as a middle-aged adult shows her as light-skinned and wearing an African tignon (head covering). Yet the accuracy of the painting is disputed. Described as beautiful and alluring, some people who knew her said she could pass for white, while others claimed she was dark-skinned. It almost goes without saying that it can't have been both.

> "In the 1820s Laveau may have developed intimate knowledge of voodoo and rootwork (also known as conjure)"

In 1823, she married a fellow 'gens de couleur libre' (free person of colour) named Jacques Paris, who came to America via the influx of Saint-Domingue (Haitian) free men, slaves and traders fleeing the uprising and battles against colonial France. Paris and Laveau were wed at St Louis Cathedral by Pere Antoine (a Spanish Capuchin friar named Antonio de Sedella who became an equally revered figure in the city and close friend to Laveau). Settling in the French Quarter, a year into the marriage Paris vanished without a trace, leaving his wife perplexed as to his whereabouts. She insisted that he had died and not walked out on her. He was never seen again…

Her next union was more rewarding and successful. With Paris out of the picture, a year later, in 1824, she was domiciled in common law marriage with Captain Christophe Dominique Glapion, with whom she would stay until his death in 1855. During their marriage Laveau gave birth to 15 children, though nearly all of them died from yellow fever or other outbreaks that plagued New Orleans due to the city's poor standard of sanitation and terrible living conditions.

It's also in this period – the 1820s – that Laveau is believed to have started her ascent to the top. In various narratives, it's claimed she was tutored by such noted figures associated with the city's underground religion as Dr John, the medicine man and ex-slave; and Marie Saloppe, who was later cast aside, something Laveau did quite viciously to send a message to others thinking about usurping her. The accuracy of this account is unclear, though detractors have picked up on Dr John's success in selling trinkets to white folk as being the impetus for Laveau to try her hand at it too.

In this decade she may have developed intimate knowledge of voodoo and rootwork (also known as conjure) and, despite her harsh treatment of rival practitioners (known as kings and queens), Laveau cultivated a public persona known for kind-heartedness and virtuous acts. For the next 30 or so years she popularised voodoo among New Orleans citizens, both rich and poor, all the while remaining a devout Catholic. Was she, then, a legitimate religious figure or a scam artist looking to bleed gullible types of a buck or two?

Laveau's occupation as a hairdresser put her in a unique position. From local gossip to insider info on the upper echelons of New Orleans elites (gleaned via their pliable servants), the voodoo queen was able to learn everybody's business and use it to her advantage. As a pillar of the community and icon to the superstitious, she became the go-to person for advice, spells and potions.

In terms of the development of Louisiana voodoo, Laveau promoted Catholic icons, incense and prayers alongside African-based totems such as the use of gris-gris (charms) and voodoo dolls. She sold mojos and other trinkets supposedly imbued with voodoo powers.

Her *New York Times* obituary described her cottage on Rue St Ann as "quaint", with a broken fence and trees drooping over the property, as if at any moment branches would pierce the abode and send it crumbling, the author painting a picture of humbleness bordering on destitution. Laveau, though, received her guests with pomp, cooking for them and making sure their ills and worries were listened to with a sympathetic ear or banished with magic, which seems a world away from lurid newspaper stories of naked dancing, serpent worship and satanic hexes. What ultimately emerges from Laveau's success as both agony aunt and voodoo queen was her personal charm and skills in dealing with people from all walks of life.

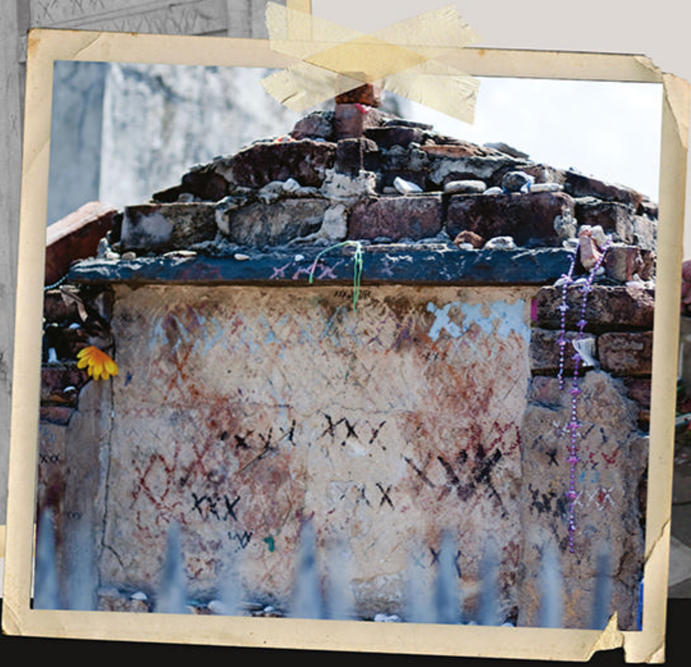
Another facet of Laveau's popularity – which was by no means all-encompassing, as many feared her as much as liked her, according to legend – were her excursions to nurse people during outbreaks of cholera and yellow fever (diseases that killed her own children). This voodoo Florence Nightingale act even extended to visiting condemned men in prison. Yet she commanded respect too. Children were kept in line by mention of her name, as if she was the bogeyman, and it was known around New Orleans that Laveau knew everybody's dirty little secrets and where bodies were figuratively buried, gathering the

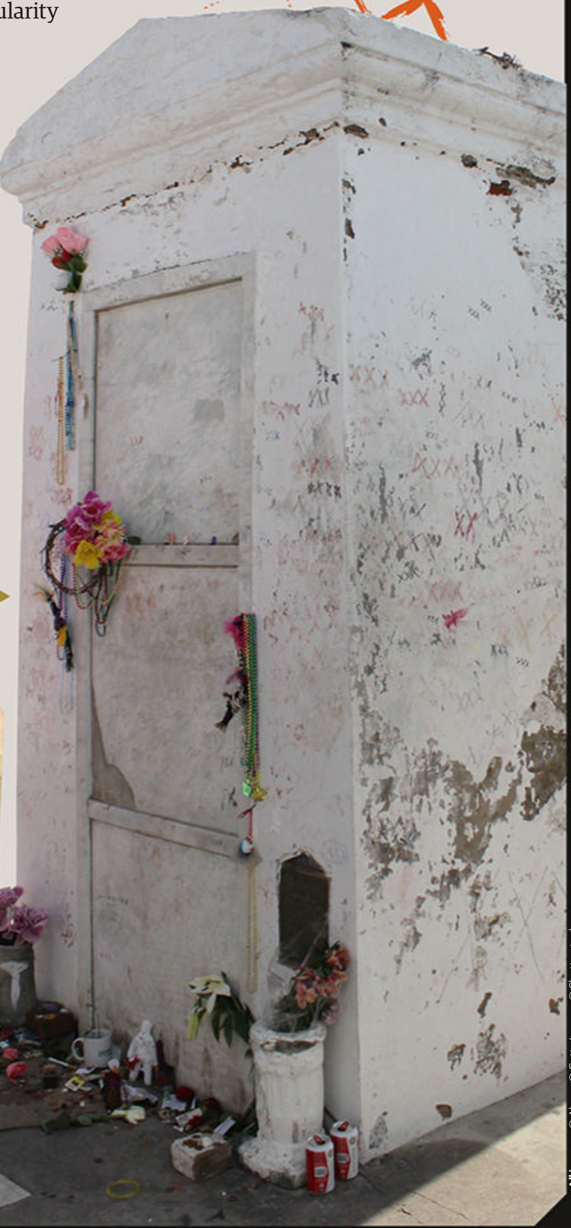
▶

BELOW-LEFT New Orleans writer Robert Tallant visits the tomb of Laveau

BELOW-MIDDLE The letters 'X' scored into her tomb are part of a devotional plea for help

BELOW To this day, tributes are left at her tomb by worshippers





All images: © Alamy, © Getty Images, © Shutterstock

information seemingly by a mixture of bullying servants with voodoo threats or plain old bribery. How she made any financial gains from this knowledge is unknown, as she lived her life in the hovel on Rue St Ann and was hardly living it up in one of the city's grand Spanish mansions.

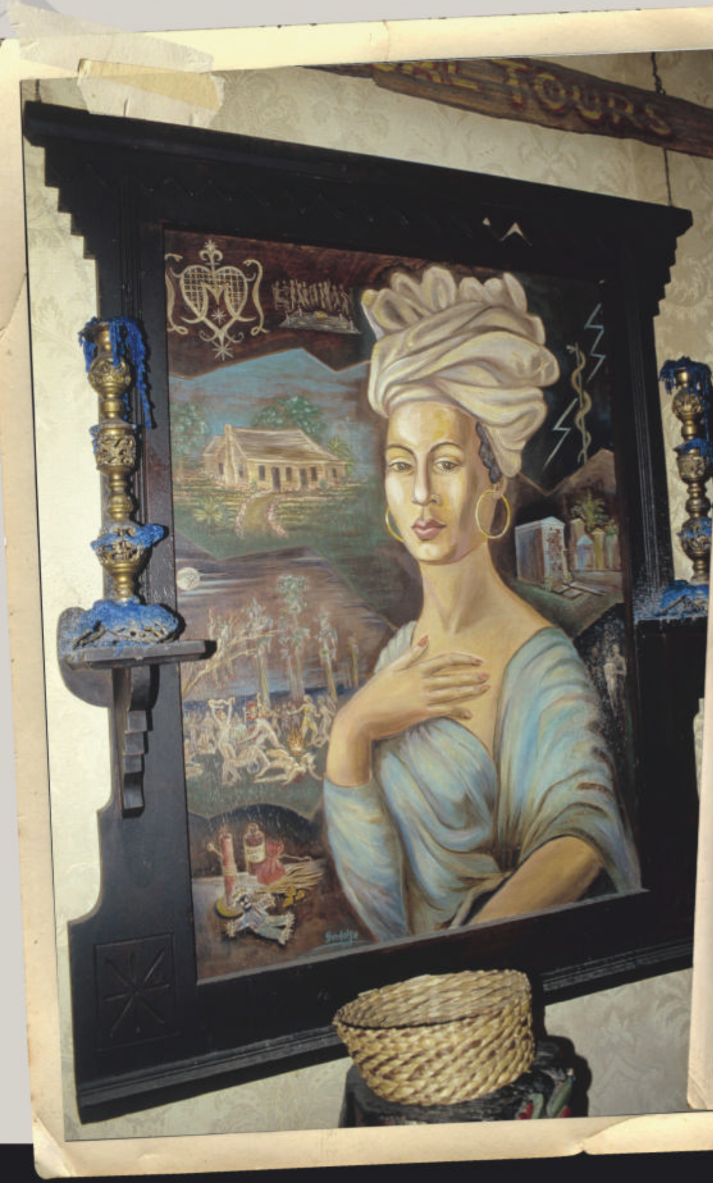
The first recorded instance of Laveau's connection with voodoo occurred in 1850, when she and a fellow gens de couleur libre named Rosine Dominique went to court to ask for the return of a statue that had been confiscated during a ritual. The ritual had been raided by the law because there were concerns of freed people mixing with slaves away from Congo Square - the designated spot in the city where they were allowed to mingle on Sundays. A newspaper report of the case claims Laveau was serving as a go-between in the community. A fine was paid and the statue returned, though not to Laveau.

> "In 1859 Laveau was described as a 'hag' who was disturbing the peace with her voodoo rituals"

In 1859, she made the papers again when a complaint was made describing her as a "hag" who was disturbing the peace with her voodoo rituals. As singing, dancing and drumming were involved, there would have been a lot of noise.

Holy figure or charlatan who used blackmail more than black magic to get her way? Laveau was and always will be a controversial figure. People to this day leave offerings of beads, booze and flowers at her tomb in St Louis Cemetery No 1 in New Orleans.

In St Louis Cemetery No 2 there is a crypt known as the Voodoo Vault, which is also believed to be her resting place, though quite how the rumour started is unknown, as her resting place is definitely the one in St Louis Cemetery No 1, marked "Famille Vve. Paris/née Laveau". The letters 'X' have been scored by hand into the brickwork as part of a devotional message and request for Laveau to make the person's wishes come true. However, voodooists consider the act disrespectful and damaging to the crypt's structure. Even so, these small acts of devotion are a powerful testament to Laveau's legacy in the Big Easy. ○



LEFT Laveau's followers sought out her advice, spells and potions

739
SPECIAL EXHIBIT
STRANGE
STRANGE
MARIE LAVEAU'S HOUSE of VOODOO

RIGHT Visitors to Marie Laveau's House of Voodoo in New Orleans can pay for psychic readings

BELOW *American Horror Story* costume worn by Angela Bassett as Marie Laveau

All images: © Alamy, © Getty Images, © Shutterstock

SPECIAL OFFER FOR OUR OVERSEAS READERS

3 ISSUES FOR $/€5

WHEN YOU SUBSCRIBE

ALL ABOUT HISTORY
THE REAL FRANKENSTEIN
Science and technology that inspired Shelley
THE SCOURGE OF GOD
ATTILA
Uncover the all-conquering Hun king whose nomadic horde terrorised Rome
THE LADY POPE
How one woman gained power in the Vatican
JUNGLE COMMANDOS
Why it was Burma or bust for Britain in WWII
HISTORY OF MUSLIM SPAIN THE INCA EARTHSHAKER
WHAT IF AMERICA STAYED OUT OF WWI? DARK LONDON

NEW! DIGITAL ACCESS TO 80+ ISSUES WHEN YOU SUBSCRIBE TO PRINT!**

The magazine that brings the past to life!

ALL ABOUT HISTORY
BRITAIN AND GUNS
THUNDERBIRDS ARE GO
GREAT POWER COUPLES
THE FIRST CHINESE EMPIRE
How the Qin forged a great power from the fragments of the Warring States

ALL ABOUT HISTORY
DOWNTONS IN DECLINE
THE BLACK DEATH
From miasma to miracles: how medieval medicine desperately battled the bubonic plague

AMERICA'S FIRST SERIAL KILLER
ALL ABOUT HISTORY
BABA YAGA?
ANCIENT SPORTS
MAKING & BREAKING TITANIC
Uncover the flaws that doomed the 'unsinkable ship' and tragic bravery of those who tried to save all

WHAT IF D-DAY FAILED?
HISTORY'S LOST TOMBS
ALL ABOUT HISTORY
INSIDE THE VIKING PANTHEON
NORSE GODS
Uncover the secrets of these Scandinavian deities and their powerful influence on the world
PLUS

AMAZING INTRODUCTORY OFFER

Order hotline 1-844-779-2822 and quote B85N

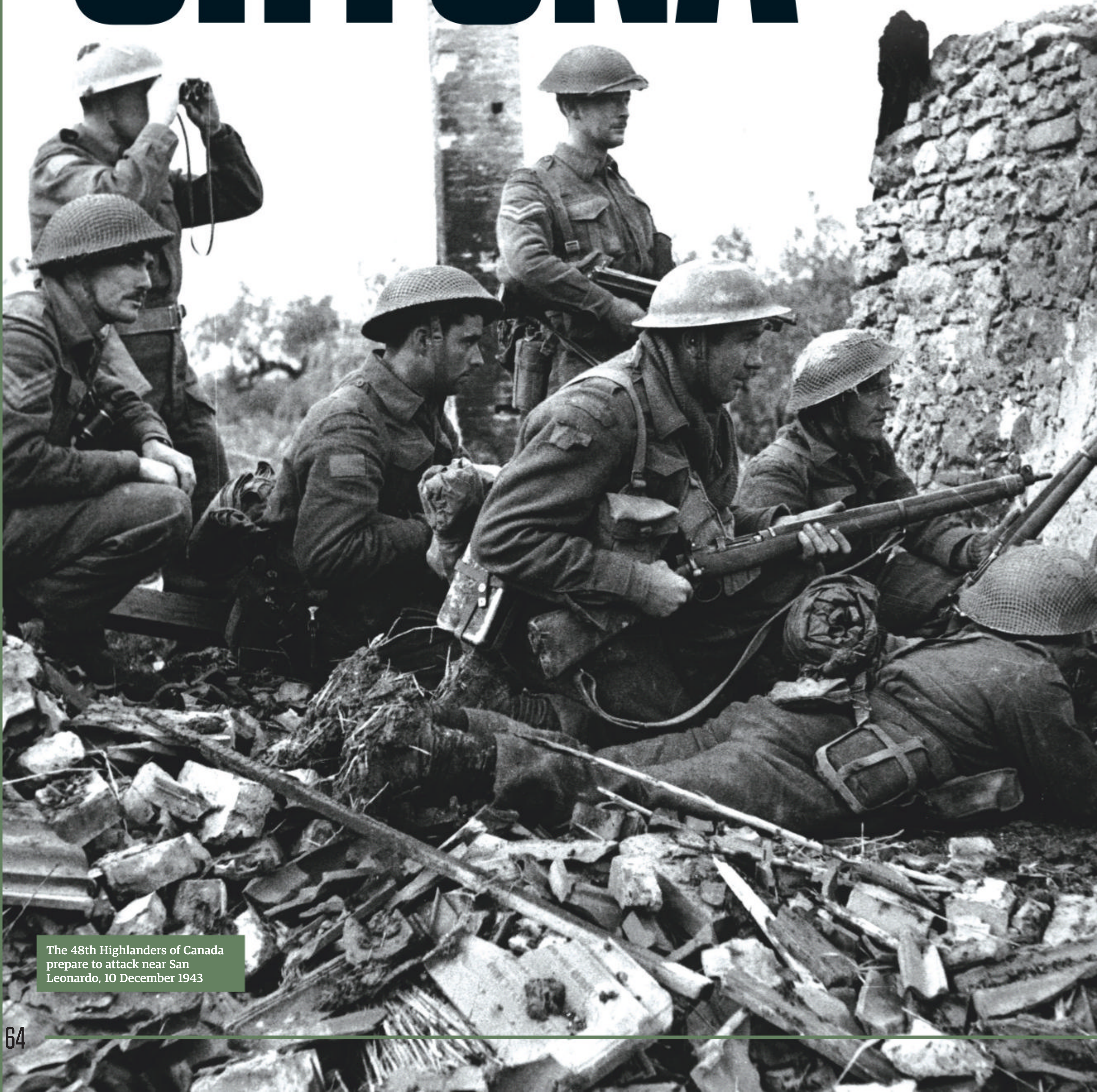
Online at magazinesdirect.com/aah/B85N

***Terms and conditions** Offer closes 12.31.2025. Offer open to new overseas subscribers only. Pay only $/€5 for your first three issues, then after your trial period ends, your subscription will continue at the price shown at the point of purchase. Savings are based on the annual subscription rate and the cover price. We will notify you in advance of any price changes. Please allow up to eight weeks for delivery of your first subscription issue. For full terms and conditions, visit www.magazinesdirect.com/terms. For enquiries please call: 1-844-779-2822. Call us toll-free from 8:30am to 5pm (Mon-Fri, EST) or email help@magazinesdirect.com. **Access to the digital library will end with your subscription.

ORTONA

ORTONA, ITALY
20-27 DECEMBER 1943

Written by Alex Bowers



The 48th Highlanders of Canada prepare to attack near San Leonardo, 10 December 1943

Much Canadian blood had been spilt on the long road to Ortona. The cruel path had begun on the shores of southern Italy in September 1943, before snaking across winter-ravaged countryside by November, all the while pushed back by German resistance efforts. Hitler had one goal: to make the Allies pay for every inch of ground.

Attached to the British Eighth Army as it clawed its way northwards, 1st Canadian Infantry Division – commanded by Major General Chris Vokes – had arrived at the south bank of the Moro River by early December. There, over several days, attempts to gain a foothold on the far side had proven costly as the 90th Panzergrenadier Division held firm, in spite of their own losses. Only on the 9th were the Canadians able to secure most of their objectives, although their ordeal against a determined enemy and challenging terrain had not yet ended.

The next obstacle became known – somewhat ominously – as The Gully: a 60m-deep, 80m-wide natural trench spanning 5km, around which the dug-in Germans lay in wait. Vokes thrust his men forward in a series of frontal assaults, each failing to dislodge the grenadiers. Nicknamed 'The Butcher' for these actions, the Canadian commander subsequently sent his French-speaking Royal 22e Régiment into the fray, at last slicing a wedge into the German defences – and, in the process, facilitating the heroic rise of Québécois Victoria Cross recipient Captain Paul Triquet.

Praised for his leadership in the face of repeated counterattacks, Triquet's exploits undoubtedly boosted morale. What they could not do was detract from the casualties sustained within 1st Canadian Infantry Division's ranks. "[Vokes] has been sharply criticised by Canadian historians for how he handled the Moro River Campaign and The Gully," says Major Jayson Geroux, a Canadian Army officer, urban operations instructor and leading expert on Ortona. "But looking back now, his decision to predominantly use 1st and 3rd Brigades, all the while leaving 2nd Brigade out of the worst of these engagements, had a huge influence on the battle that still lay ahead."

'A TOUGH NUT TO CRACK'

That battle was Ortona, an ancient Italian town pressed up against the Adriatic Sea. General Bernard Montgomery, overall commander of Eighth Army, had set his sights on the picturesque community, believing it to be a stepping stone en route to the coastal town of Pescara beyond. Once Ortona and then Pescara were in Allied hands, it was thought that a left hook on a pass through the Appenine Mountains could threaten Rome on the west coast. Additionally, the ever-ambitious Montgomery hoped to secure Ortona's small port for Allied supplies despite the likelihood – and ultimate reality – that the Germans would destroy it. Nevertheless, Ortona had strategic value insofar as Highway 16, a main thoroughfare for the advancing force, ran through the town. "The saying goes that amateurs talk tactics and strategy, and professionals talk logistics," says Geroux. "You clear Ortona, and you have Highway 16 open for the bullets and beans to be fed up [to Eighth Army]."

Unbeknown to Allied authorities, the enemy planned on holding the town at all costs. Geroux explains: "Canadians are thinking they're going to face the Germans for 24 to 48 hours because that's the precedent set at this stage, and that's what British intelligence has told them to expect. But we all know now that regular German Wehrmacht units had been in Ortona since September 1943, allowing them months to prepare. Most importantly, the Germans had decided that Ortona would be the eastern anchor point of the Gustav Line; it's not going to be farther northwest at the Arielli River like British Eighth Army thinks.

> **“PRAISED FOR HIS LEADERSHIP IN THE FACE OF REPEATED ENEMY COUNTERATTACKS, TRIQUET'S REMARKABLE EXPLOITS UNDOUBTEDLY BOOSTED MORALE”**

"It gets worse because Wehrmacht troops are replaced by the 1st Fallschirmjäger Division on 19 December 1943, one day before the battle starts… These motivated German paratroopers don't have tanks, and they're going to need to hold the Gustav Line. What's more perfect for a unit that doesn't have tanks than to put them in an urban area on a plateau?"

With a ravine to the west and the sea to the east of Ortona, terrain was again working against the Canadians, who would have no choice but to attack from the south. The Germans, aware of their geographical advantage, had planned accordingly with tactics as old as the Medieval town itself. "You've got enemy pioneers and engineers… destroying buildings to create rubble in the streets, funnelling [the Canadians] into designated killing zones at the five piazze, or squares," says Geroux. "They're clearing fields of fire, putting in booby traps and improvised explosive devices, and bolstering other defensive preparations that will make Ortona an extremely tough nut to crack… The Germans are essentially practising urban operations doctrine before it was doctrine… and the Canadians have no clue about any of this."

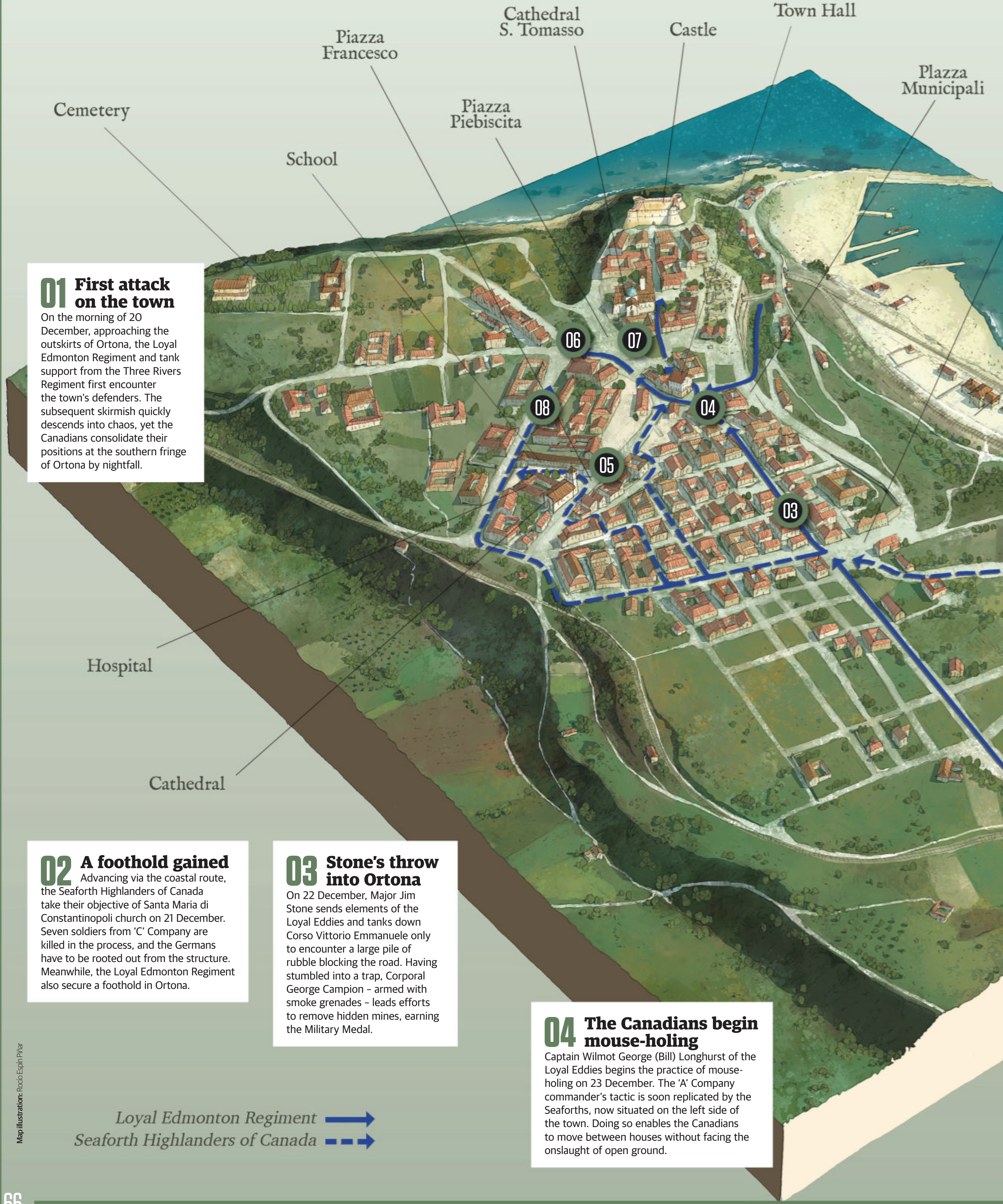
SETTING THE TRAP

They would soon find out. Having avoided the worst fighting of the Moro River and The Gully, 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade under Brigadier Bertram 'Hoffy' Hoffmeister was tasked with leading the assault. The Loyal Edmonton Regiment (nicknamed the 'Loyal Eddies') would enter Ortona along Highway 16, the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada (the 'Seaforths') would approach along the eastern coastal route, and Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI, or the 'Patricias') would be in reserve. Meanwhile, support units such as engineers, artillery and Sherman tanks from the 12th Canadian Armoured ('Three Rivers') Regiment were to be made available, partially offsetting the absence of aerial bombing in a futile bid to claim the port intact. The stage, or trap, had been set.

On a cold and cloudy 20 December, the Loyal Eddies' 'B' and 'D' Companies, advancing with Three Rivers Regiment tanks, encountered their first taste of what the 1st Fallschirmjäger Division had in store. Under fire and slowed by a muddy quagmire, 'C' Squadron troop commander Lieutenant TE Melvin decided to brave driving down the road. Within moments, his crew struck a concealed explosive device, sending the Sherman 6m into the air and killing everyone inside. The troop's three remaining tanks avoided the smoking crater only to discover they had been masterfully diverted into a minefield. The devastation to the armour largely halted the advance, mirroring the Seaforths on the right flank after they likewise experienced tougher-than-expected resistance.

DRAWING THE SHORT STRAW

Straddling the southern outskirts of Ortona looking inwards, the Canadians' true


Cathedral S. Tomasso
Castle
Town Hall
Piazza Francesco
Plazza Municipali
Piazza Piebiscita
Cemetery
School
Hospital
Cathedral
01
02
03
04
05
06
07
08
Loyal Edmonton Regiment
Seaforth Highlanders of Canada

01 First attack on the town

On the morning of 20 December, approaching the outskirts of Ortona, the Loyal Edmonton Regiment and tank support from the Three Rivers Regiment first encounter the town's defenders. The subsequent skirmish quickly descends into chaos, yet the Canadians consolidate their positions at the southern fringe of Ortona by nightfall.

02 A foothold gained

Advancing via the coastal route, the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada take their objective of Santa Maria di Constantinopoli church on 21 December. Seven soldiers from 'C' Company are killed in the process, and the Germans have to be rooted out from the structure. Meanwhile, the Loyal Edmonton Regiment also secure a foothold in Ortona.

03 Stone's throw into Ortona

On 22 December, Major Jim Stone sends elements of the Loyal Eddies and tanks down Corso Vittorio Emmanuele only to encounter a large pile of rubble blocking the road. Having stumbled into a trap, Corporal George Campion – armed with smoke grenades – leads efforts to remove hidden mines, earning the Military Medal.

04 The Canadians begin mouse-holing

Captain Wilmot George (Bill) Longhurst of the Loyal Eddies begins the practice of mouse-holing on 23 December. The 'A' Company commander's tactic is soon replicated by the Seaforths, now situated on the left side of the town. Doing so enables the Canadians to move between houses without facing the onslaught of open ground.

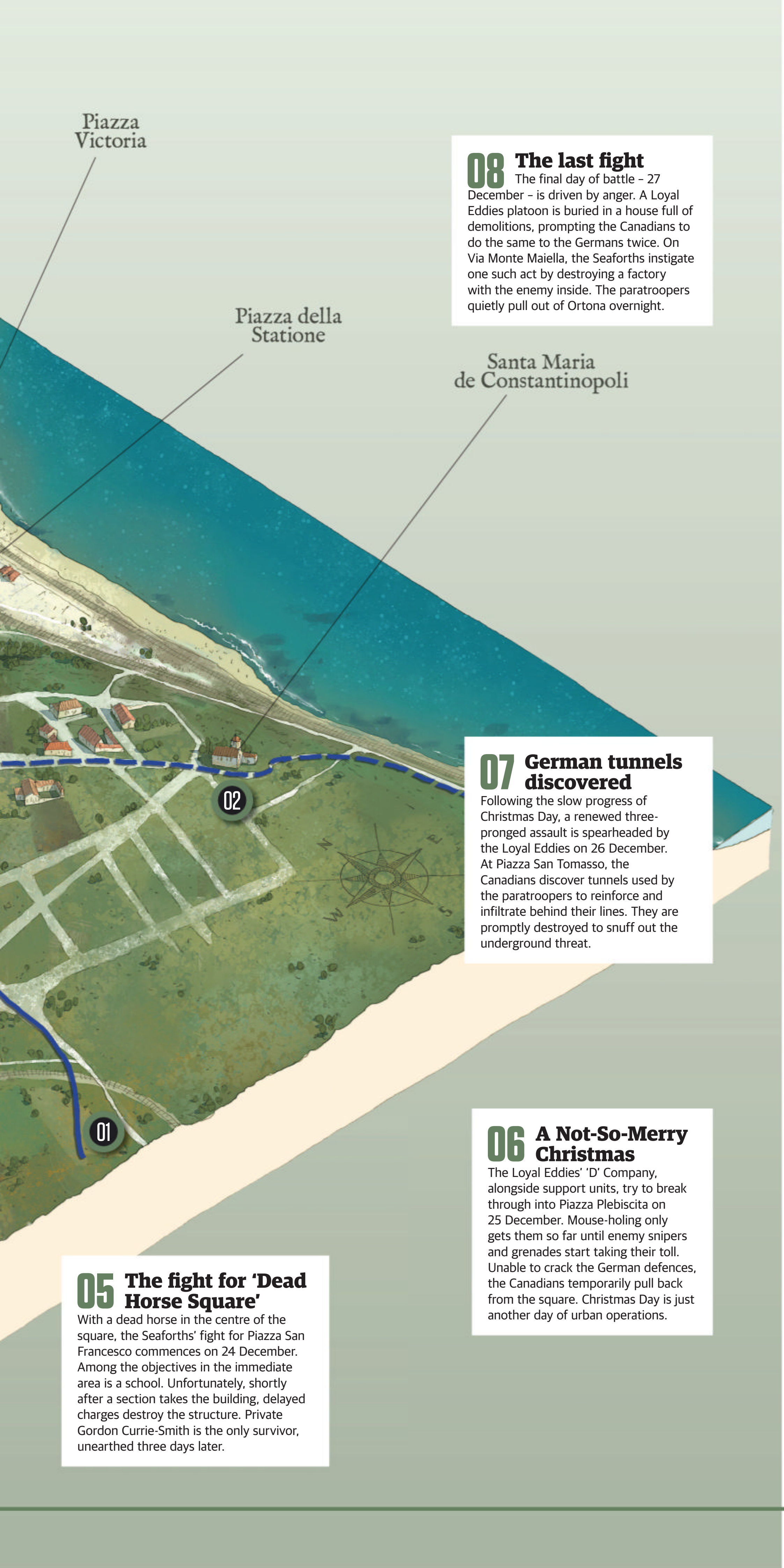
Map illustration: Rocío Espín Piñar

test would commence the following day, 21 December. Their ordeal would be shared with the town's residents – the Ortonesi – when, at approximately 7am that morning, German explosives were detonated in the Cattedrale San Tomasso as part of the paratroopers' defensive plan. "The cathedral was the most revered in Ortona," says Geroux. "It purportedly housed the tomb of the Christian apostle Saint Thomas, and in fact it was destroyed on the Feast Day of Saint Thomas, an annual event marked by the Ortonesi for centuries… The Germans knew all of this, I'm pretty sure." Around the same time, 'B' Company of the Loyal Eddies started making progress when it cut through the countryside to reach a cluster of buildings on the town's edge. 'D' Company under Major James 'Big Jim' Stone, however, was less fortunate when scores of his troops were cut down by "murderous fire" as they crossed an open field. After two aborted attempts on the objective, the 100-strong unit had been whittled down to no more than 30 fit and able men.

Stone divided his depleted company into three groups, then had their newly assigned leaders draw lots for the third thrust forward. Picking the short straw, Lieutenant John Dougan decided on a different approach via a small ditch that came up beside a German-controlled building. The risk of being caught by a well-placed machine gun seemed huge, but Dougan had a less-than-encouraging argument for trying: "We're all going to die anyway, so we might as well give it a go." Thankfully, the gamble paid off when the ditch turned out to be unguarded and the house unoccupied. The nearby entrenched Germans, oblivious to the bold manoeuvre, were promptly dispatched from behind. By the end of the day, the Loyal Eddies had penetrated into Ortona, reaching the southern limits of Piazza Vittoria.

The right-flanking Seaforth Highlanders, still approaching from the eastern coastal route, also achieved greater success than the day before. Enduring small but sharp enemy firefights, snipers, mortar and artillery fire, the Canadians secured their primary objective of Santa Maria di Constantinopoli church. Hoffmeister, observing the battle a short distance away, eventually instructed a company of the Seaforths to bolster the Loyal Eddies, leaving the rest of the companies and supporting armour to clear the area surrounding the original church objective.

Over the coming days, Hoffmeister took a more hands-on approach by visiting the battalions in place. "Hoffy had had some challenges prior to the war, but when it came to the business of soldiering, he just



05 The fight for 'Dead Horse Square'

With a dead horse in the centre of the square, the Seaforths' fight for Piazza San Francesco commences on 24 December. Among the objectives in the immediate area is a school. Unfortunately, shortly after a section takes the building, delayed charges destroy the structure. Private Gordon Currie-Smith is the only survivor, unearthed three days later.

06 A Not-So-Merry Christmas

The Loyal Eddies' 'D' Company, alongside support units, try to break through into Piazza Plebiscita on 25 December. Mouse-holing only gets them so far until enemy snipers and grenades start taking their toll. Unable to crack the German defences, the Canadians temporarily pull back from the square. Christmas Day is just another day of urban operations.

07 German tunnels discovered

Following the slow progress of Christmas Day, a renewed three-pronged assault is spearheaded by the Loyal Eddies on 26 December. At Piazza San Tomasso, the Canadians discover tunnels used by the paratroopers to reinforce and infiltrate behind their lines. They are promptly destroyed to snuff out the underground threat.

08 The last fight

The final day of battle – 27 December – is driven by anger. A Loyal Eddies platoon is buried in a house full of demolitions, prompting the Canadians to do the same to the Germans twice. On Via Monte Maiella, the Seaforths instigate one such act by destroying a factory with the enemy inside. The paratroopers quietly pull out of Ortona overnight.

> WE'RE ALL GOING TO DIE ANYWAY, SO WE MIGHT AS WELL GIVE IT A GO

really knew his stuff," explains Geroux. "He knew how to lead by example. He knew that in order to get the most out of his troops, he had to take the same risks as them. He was almost killed three times during the Battle of Ortona. Why? Because he was up there seeing the situation for himself, giving encouragement to his battalion commanders and company commanders… He was the right leader at the right time."

A FRESH GAMBLE

With the growing darkness, both sides broke off contact and, for a few tense hours, often interrupted by artillery, tried to rest – sometimes mere metres apart. The violence was renewed on the morning of 22 December when the Loyal Eddies managed to clear Piazza Vittoria with an eye on the next square, Piazza Municipali.

Between the two piazze was the road known as Corso Vittorio Emmanuele, on either side of which were German-occupied houses. Fresh off his subaltern's gamble the day before, 'D' Company's Stone again decided to try his luck. His infantry, accompanied by tanks blaring their sirens, would make a surprise charge up the road towards the square near the town centre, bypassing several enemy-held buildings. The move did not entirely unfold as planned. "You have to remember that the Germans are trying to draw the Canadians into Piazza Municipali; that's part of their main defence area…" Geroux explains. "And so Big Jim Stone's force comes up against a huge rubble pile blocking the way, where one of the tankers thinks he sees a hidden landmine. Stone is furious and uses colourful words because he's lost the momentum. But now, the Germans open fire, so the Loyal Eddies burst into the buildings to clear them… The rubble pile is later de-mined, but getting over it has to become the next day's problem."

Despite the hurdle, the Eddies had carved a toehold into the Old Town by nightfall. However, the tenacity of Ortona's defenders had raised questions. "The light bulb goes on with both [Brigadier] Hoffy and [1st Canadian Division commander] Vokes," says Geroux. "It dawns on them that the Gustav Line is not back at the Arielli River. This is the Gustav Line… And so, Hoffy decides to commit more resources to the battle, including more tanks, and shifts the Seaforths from the right to the left flank. The Highlanders crisscross the Loyal Eddies' lines overnight and, the following day [23 December], they will be focusing their attention on reaching the westerly Piazza San Francesco. Vokes then realises that in order to defeat the Germans, the Canadians are going to have to get up to the north side of Ortona. So, [Vokes] sends 1st and 3rd Brigades up the west side of the ravine so they can get to the north end of the town and isolate."

MOUSE-HOLING MAYHEM

The plan was a sound one. Unfortunately, the flanking manoeuvre would do little to prevent Ortona becoming a vicious urban hellscape. On 23 December, having penetrated through to Piazza Municipali, the Loyal Eddies implemented a new tactic. "Old Town's buildings are shoulder-to-shoulder," explains Geroux. "So ['A' Company commander] Captain Bill Longhurst calls

Troops of 'B' Company, the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada, filing along the coastal path toward Ortona

Image source: Library and Archives Canada/Department of National Defence fonds/PA-152749

BELOW-INSET Major General Chris Vokes led 1st Canadian Infantry Division. However, Brigadier Hoffmeister largely orchestrated efforts within Ortona

BOTTOM-INSET Brigadier Bert 'Hoffy' Hoffmeister, commander of 2nd Brigade, is regarded as one of WWII'S top Canadian leaders

2x Image source: Library and Archives Canada/Department of National Defence up infantry pioneers, and he calls up his engineers, and he instructs them to head upstairs where they blow a hole into the next building. You then throw grenades into the hole and clear that building from the top downwards, meaning the Germans no longer have the initiative… It's much easier to fight that way because grenades are easier thrown down – gravity is your friend. This is called mouse-holing, although it should be said that it's not a Canadian invention. Longhurst is just practising common-sense urban warfare doctrine."

It wasn't long before the Seaforth Highlanders, at that point fighting on the left flank of the Loyal Eddies, heard about mouse-holing and began implementing the technique themselves. Nor would such brute force be an exclusively infantry affair. The Three Rivers Regiment tanks, alongside the artillery's six-pounders, joined in the cacophony by blasting the stubborn German paratroopers out of their defensive strongpoints.

Nevertheless, come Christmas Eve progress slowed significantly, almost to a stalemate, as the Canadians struggled to seize the main piazze. "There are several reasons for this," says Geroux. "First, German reinforcements have arrived on the scene. Second, Hitler has weighed in that Ortona must not fall. Third, the Canadians have reached the enemy's principle defensive point in the town."

'NOBODY WANTS TO DIE ON XMAS DAY'

There would be no let-up on 25 December amid the ruins of Ortona. "Of course… nobody wants to die on Christmas Day," says Geroux. "But you don't see a truce like 1914. There's no soccer match between Canadians and Germans… The Seaforths are still fighting in Piazza San Francesco – dubbed Dead Horse Square after a literal dead horse in the centre – and the Loyal Eddies are still fighting out from Piazza Municipali." Yet there would be some semblance of respite for the Seaforths who, through rotation of the companies, received a festive meal in the bombed-out church of Santa Maria di Constantinopoli. Trimmings included pork with apple sauce, mixed vegetables, mashed potatoes, gravy, Christmas pudding and minced pie, all washed down with a single bottle of beer and enjoyed with cigarettes. The Loyal Eddies were less fortunate, with a few men afforded the chance to wolf down cold pork chops near the front. Then it was back to the bloodshed.

But there was an end in sight – even if the bruised and battered Canadians did not know it at that time. "Outside Ortona, 1st and 3rd Brigades are slowly, incrementally, gaining ground," says Geroux. "The Germans are now concerned that they're going to lose two battalions inside the town once 1st and 3rd Brigades swing round to the north and cut them off at the Adriatic. So, on Christmas Day, the Germans have decided they need to withdraw – but they can't let Hitler, or the Canadians, know their plan. The paratroopers put out over the radio that they will reinforce, counterattack and up the violence levels, knowing that Canadian signal intelligence will intercept it and think they're in for a long fight."

Image source: Library and Archives Canada/Department of National Defence fonds/PA-114030

ABOVE The Loyal Eddies, engineers and tanks advance along Corso Vittorio Emmanuele

THE STORM BEFORE THE CALM

Part of the deception ploy would actually be genuine: over the next two days, 26-27 December, the battle for the town's northern piazze – and the Battle of Ortona overall – descended into chaos. Among those who bore witness to the destruction was Canadian war artist Charles Comfort. Renowned for his later depictions of the abhorrent conditions, he said of the urban fighting: "The Seaforths and the Edmontons were at the throats of the paratroopers… groping through suffocating dust and smoke, stumbling over unturned furniture and debris, struggling breathlessly in nightmare darkness, felling, clubbing, blasting, shooting it out… The Jerry [German] sappers are systematically dynamiting buildings into the street in a desperate delaying action. The barriers of rubble are quickly sown with mines and covered by raking fire. Dust and lead and fragmentation fill the flaming night."

The likes of Piazza Municipali, Piazza Plebiscita and Piazza San Tomasso were each eventually claimed by the Canadians, but it was now emotion – anger – driving the men forward. Demolishing buildings with enemy troops inside became a commonplace tactic on both sides. Terrified civilians, huddled in basements, were likewise crushed to death when the buildings collapsed on top of them. Artillery pummelled the town indiscriminately, contributing to the apocalyptic inferno. And all the while, casualties mounted alarmingly. "At one stage, Vokes comes to Hoffy and asks if he wants to withdraw," explains Geroux. "Knowing that that would destroy morale, Hoffy replies: 'Absolutely not. We're seeing this out to the very end.'"

HOLDING THEIR OWN

That end arrived on the morning of 28 December when news spread that the paratroopers had slipped away in the night. Ortona was in Canadian hands – or at least the shell of a town now nicknamed Little Stalingrad. Bloody December, as it became known when combined with the Moro River and Gully campaigns, had cost 1st Canadian Infantry Division 2,339 total casualties, 502 of whom had been killed. German figures are scarce, but some 100 unburied paratroopers were recovered from Ortona alone. However, it had been the Ortonesi who had paid the highest price, with 1,300 killed in the crossfire or in their cellars. Their loss served as a reminder that innocent people were, and are, the greatest victims of war.

Asked about the battle's legacy, Geroux remarks: "Ortona is a small fight. It's a really small urban engagement… Does it have a huge impact on the Italian campaign? I'm not so sure. Was it an important battle for the Canadians? Yes, and it produced some important lessons… Like the Germans, I think the Canadians were practising urban warfare doctrine before the doctrine was written and codified. And I think from the standpoint of urban warfare, they did extremely well… Urban warfare is one of the most challenging environments to fight in… and we proved we could hold our own."

LOVELY DAY FOR IT

WHAT IF...

THE US HAD STAYED OUT OF THE GREAT WAR?

A prolonged conflict, a modified Treaty of Versailles and no League of Nations may have transpired without direct American involvement

Interview by David J Williamson

INTERVIEW WITH

© Clive Webb

CLIVE WEBB

Professor of Modern American history at the University of Sussex, Webb's writing has appeared in *The Guardian*, *Independent* and *The New York Times*. His book *Vietdamned: How the World's Greatest Minds Put America on Trial* is on sale now.

© Iwan Morgan

IWAN MORGAN

Emeritus Professor of US Studies at the Institute of the Americas, University College London, and an honorary fellow of Oxford University's Rothermere American Institute, Morgan has authored many books on US presidents, including *FDR: Transforming the Presidency and Renewing America*.

Although the United States had supported the Allied cause in the First World War with weapons, supplies and financial considerations, the introduction of American troops and other military assets in a direct role in 1917-18 was welcomed by the war-weary nations of Britain and France, and was an ominous development for Germany and the Central Powers. However, the absence of this US commitment to an active military role in the Great War may well have altered the outcome of the conflict along with the structure and steadiness of the tenuous peace that followed the armistice and the terms of the Treaty of Versailles.

How would the outcome of the Great War have been altered if the US had not entered the fight?

Clive Webb: Historians are not usually in the prediction business, not least when it concerns a future that never came to pass, and that may account for the lack of consensus about how US neutrality would have affected the outcome of the First World War. Some alternative histories have the Central Powers claiming victory. That would have led to Germany dictating peace terms that established it as the hegemonic power in Europe. Britain and France would've been ruined economically and unable to pay their debts, which in turn would've had ruinous consequences for their American creditors.

Others insist that the Allies would eventually have won. At least one historian has claimed that it would have been better for the USA not to intervene because the mobilisation of the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) expended time, effort and resources that should have been invested in the British and French military. The USA therefore slowed rather than accelerated Allied victory. In a history where Britain and France used their unrestricted access to US war production to overcome the Central Powers, they would have no need to invite US President Woodrow Wilson to the peace table and could have imposed more punitive terms on their defeated foe. That settlement would have restored the same international system that had led to war in the first place.

My approach is to work backwards from what we know. US intervention raised Allied morale at a crucial moment in the war when Britain and France had suffered huge losses without approaching a decisive breakthrough. They were more or less financially bankrupt and unable to pay for further resources from the US. There was therefore little prospect of complete victory over the Central Powers without American support either in terms of industrial production or military reinforcement. So US intervention was crucial both to when and on what terms the war finally ended.

ABOVE US General John J Pershing arrives in France, 3 June 1917

Had either side won without the USA having intervened, then Wilson would not have been involved in post-war negotiations. That would have meant an abandonment of his aspirations for a new international order based on collective security and free trade. The League of Nations would not have been created.

Iwan Morgan: The odds still favoured an Allied victory. The Allied blockade was taking its toll on the German homefront, Germany had not been able to rapidly transfer sufficient units from the Eastern Front, and the establishment of a unified Anglo-French command made for improved defensive and offensive operations in 1918. That said, the Germans may have continued the war longer than they did, leading to overwhelming war weariness among the British and French, but there was also the question of how long Germany could have gone on fighting.

Would the German 1918 Spring Offensive still have taken place?

Webb: Germany would certainly have had more time to prepare the Spring

All images: © Getty Images

AMERICAN FINANCIERS WERE HEAVILY INVESTED IN AN ANGLO-FRENCH VICTORY

Offensive if it had not been rushed into action by US intervention. Whether that could have proven decisive in securing victory depends on how well prepared and executed the offensive was. It is plausible that without the US entering the war Germany would have been able to counter the Allies long enough to secure a negotiated peace settlement that would have avoided the anger and bitterness which fuelled Nazism.

Morgan: True, but Germany's own need to end the war as soon as possible also drove the offensive, which petered out before large numbers of American troops arrived. Economically, the British and French were more capable of continuing the war than the Germans.

Would a more balanced armistice have been possible?

Morgan: The Kaiser's position would still have been in doubt had the Entente triumphed without US involvement because it blamed German militarism for the war. Arguably Wilson wanted to be a moderating influence at Versailles, but the French wanted a harsh peace and the British by and large supported them. Without the US at the table, the Germans may well have got worse terms.

Would Germany still have been defeated without the Americans?

Webb: Had the lack of US intervention led to a military stalemate then a more balanced armistice is conceivable. What the terms of the settlement would have been is open to speculation but presumably would mean the Germans retained more of their territories and industrial base, and also not have to concede entire blame for causing the war.

How would the Entente fare without the billions of dollars in loans from the United States?

Webb: Had America maintained the strictest neutrality and not provided loans to Britain and France they could not have won the war. Without either the will or the way to fight on probably into 1919, stalemate or defeat was the only conceivable outcome.

Morgan: The Entente had already borrowed heavily from US creditors long before the US entered the war. Whether the flow of credit would have continued if the war had gone deep into a fifth or sixth year is a matter of debate, but US financiers were so heavily invested in an Anglo-French victory that they could not easily have stopped the loan spigot.

Would the 'American Century' have been cancelled?

Webb: The United States was the most powerful industrial nation in the world by the time of the Great War. Its rise as the preeminent global superpower would have occurred with or without the conflict. The US retreated into isolationism in reaction to a war that many Americans believed they should never have become involved in and, of course, the country did not become a member of the League of Nations. In that sense, the conflict slowed rather than advanced the international dominance of the US.

Morgan: The 'American Century' would have happened anyway because the longer the war went on the greater would have been the depletion of the resources of the once-Great Powers of Europe.

How would not entering the war have affected US history?

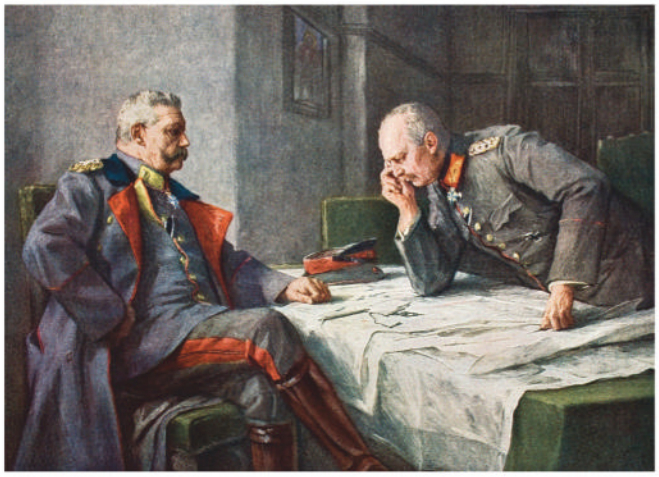
Webb: Not entering the First World

BELOW
Allied artillery crews head to the frontline

LEFT
Two American soldiers rush towards a German bunker

RIGHT
Generals Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff discuss German strategy during WWI

BOTTOM
British and French soldiers march through a town, spring 1918



War would have affected the course of US history both domestically and internationally. The war had an important impact on American race and gender relations. War production accelerated the migration of African-Americans from the rural South to the industrial North. The experience of serving in a segregated army also sharpened Black political consciousness. Black soldiers realised they would not benefit from the war they were fighting in, the democratic rhetoric of the US government meaning little for them in reality. This led many Black veterans to become more involved in the fight for racial equality after the war. US intervention accelerated the momentum of the civil rights struggle, which would conceivably have been slower had the country remained neutral. A similar case can be made about women's rights because the important contribution of women to the American war effort converted Wilson to the cause of female suffrage.

Neutrality would not have immunised the United States from the influenza pandemic, but the scale and speed of infection owed much to the war. The first documented case of 'Spanish' flu occurred at an army base in Kansas and the concentration of soldiers in unsanitary conditions acted as an incubator of the disease. And it was veterans returning from overseas who were responsible for the second wave of the virus reaching the United States. There is no way to calculate how many fewer Americans would have died than the 675,000 who actually lost their lives to the disease.

The forces that caused or deepened the Great Depression – the destabilisation of the international economic system, countries defaulting on loans, tariff wars, inadequate business and banking deregulation – would all be in play whether or not the USA had intervened in the First World War.

Morgan: The 'Spanish' flu was completely misnamed. It arguably began in the United States and was transported to Europe by the AEF. It may not have had such devastating consequences on the rest of the world if the US had not entered the war, but America's international connections may still have spread it far and wide.

The catastrophic effect of the Great War on the European economies made an international economic crisis almost inevitable. An Anglo-French victory would still have imposed harsh reparation terms on Germany, with the strong likelihood of a financial crisis occurring once nations sought to reestablish the gold standard. Without US involvement in the Great War, there may well have been an effort to create some form of collective security, but it would have depended on Anglo-French will to enforce it – so its duration would have been limited.

ALTERNATE REALITIES

SPECIFICS

1918

SPRING OFFENSIVE SPUTTERS

The German offensive made initial territorial gains but lack of troops, weapons and equipment rendered it unsustainable as British and French resistance stiffened. The Germans also had logistical challenges and overextended supply lines. Allied counterattacks were bolstered with the expectation and continuing arrival of US troops. Economic unrest and war fatigue in Germany destabilised the situation at home, contributing to the necessity of a negotiated peace.

1917

US TROOPS ARRIVE

The first American troops arrived in Europe in June 1917 but did not fight until October. They underwent extensive training after reaching France, and controversy developed as to their deployment to the front. While British and French officers proposed US troops fall under their command as replacements, General John J Pershing insisted that US forces would serve under American officers.

1918

ONE HUNDRED DAYS

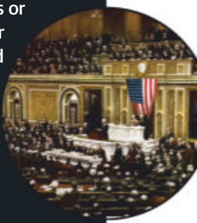
Allied counterattacks, beginning on 8 August, led to the rapid exhaustion of the German capability to continue the war and drove them back beyond the Hindenburg Line. Allied commanders had conceived the Hundred Days to seize the initiative in the field as the Germans had suffered extensive casualties and were overextended. By 11 November 1918 the armistice was concluded as Germany had no choice but to seek peace.

SPECULATION

1917

USA ISOLATIONISM

The US public was reluctant to enter the war, but the sinking of the RMS Lusitania, the declaration of unrestricted submarine warfare, the revelation of the 1917 Zimmermann Telegram and other German provocations swayed public opinion, and President Woodrow Wilson went to Congress for a declaration of war in April 1917. Had US Isolationists been more vociferous or German hostility better contained, the battlefield situation would have been altered.



1918

KAISER WILHELM II REMAINS IN POWER

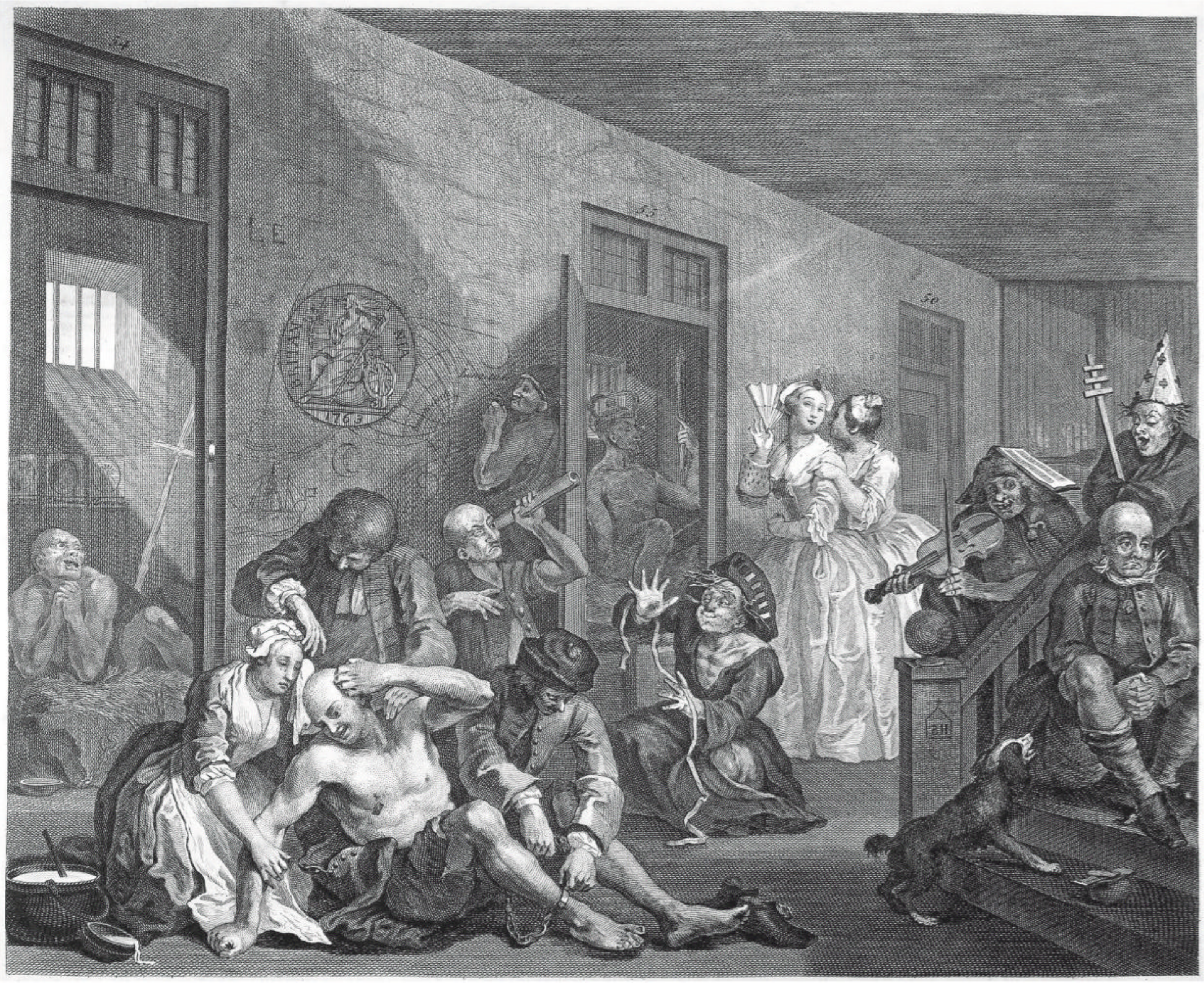
Continued US neutrality in the war might have allowed Kaiser Wilhelm II to remain in power. He abdicated his throne and fled to the Netherlands on 9 November 1918, two days before the conclusion of the armistice. His removal facilitated peace negotiations with the Allies since he'd long presented an antagonistic posture, while Germany sought territorial gains and international prestige prior to the outbreak of hostilities.

1920

NAZI RISE PREVENTED

Had prolonged US neutrality allowed Germany to prevail in the war or achieve more favourable peace terms, the rise of right-wing totalitarian political and paramilitary forces in post-war Germany could have been curbed or eliminated. Economic collapse may have been inevitable, but the Nazis' 'stab in the back' theory would likely have been implausible in the minds of many Germans.

All images: © Alamy, © Getty Images



LONDON'S UNDERWORLD

Step away from the bright lights and bustle and explore the capital's dark side

London from 1750 to 1914 was at the heart of a global empire, a centre of the Industrial Revolution and arguably the most powerful city in the world. But, like all major cities, it had a shadowy underbelly of murder, terrorism, tragedy and supernatural happenings. Now this darker side of the capital's history is explored in a new book by social historian Dr Drew Gray.

Split into four chapters entitled *Crime and Punishment*, *Death and the Supernatural*, *Dens of Vice and Iniquity*, and *Disasters and Destitution*, *Dark London: A Journey Through the City's Mysterious and Macabre Underworld* delves into the seamier history of the capital through more than 100 cases and stories. From the murders of serial killer Jack the Ripper to the lesser-known activities of the grave-robbing London Burkers, Gray brings out of the shadows tales of spooky Victorian seances, the mistreatment of patients at Bedlam, the 1875 Whitechapel Tragedy and more. He also looks at how London's prisons, courts and workhouses dealt with the grim chaos. Richly illustrated and covering a wide array of topics, *Dark London* is an engaging anthology of morbid episodes from the city's past.

BRUTAL BEDLAM

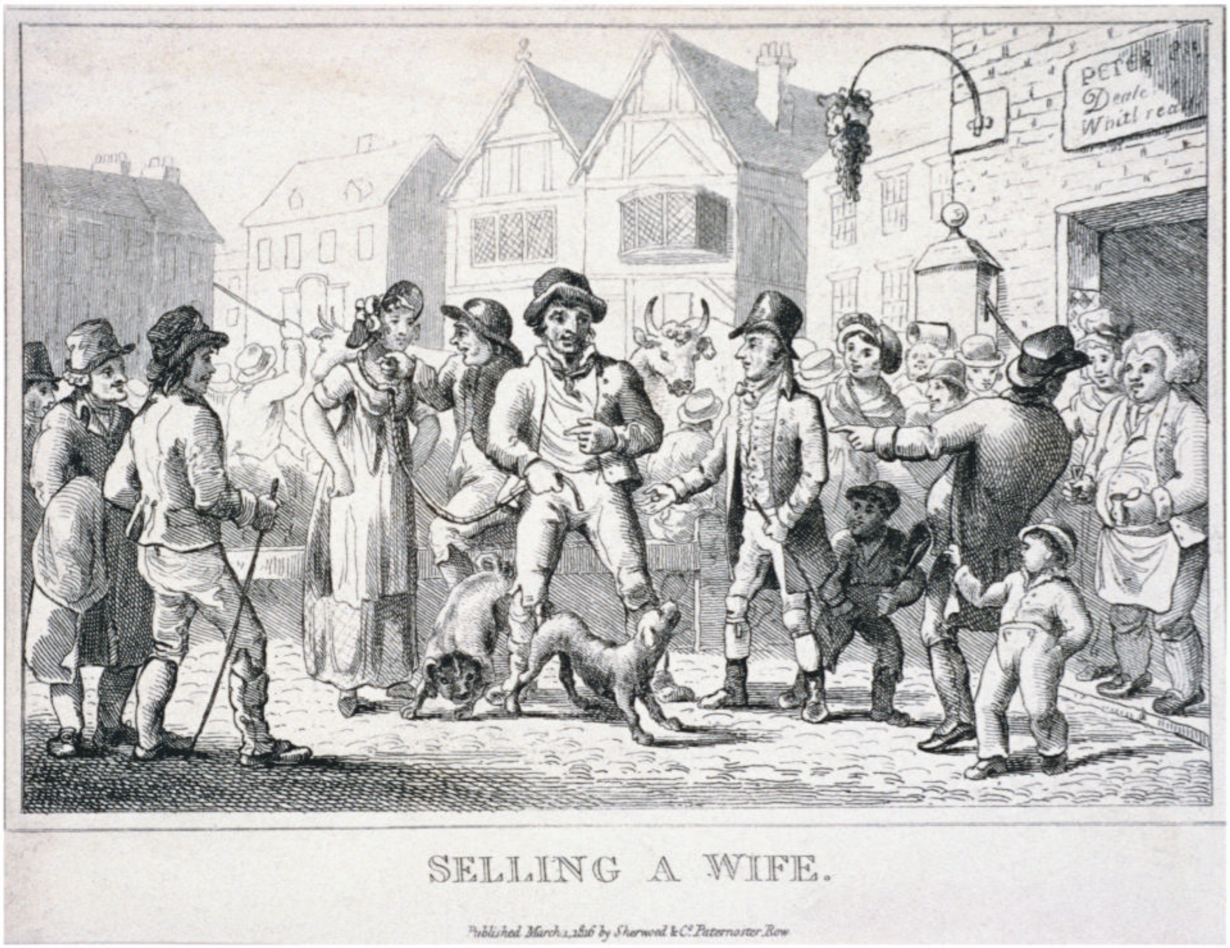
◀ Since the 14th century Bethlehem Hospital, better known as Bedlam, had been an infamous place of incarceration for people classed as insane. It also became a popular destination for tourists, who paid to observe the patients and the inhumane treatment they were subjected to.

© Princeton University Art Museum, Gift of Mrs William H. Walker

MRS MARKET

▶ During the 18th and 19th centuries the practice of wife selling saw women auctioned off in public by their husbands to other men, who would then take the woman as their spouse. These deals were often arranged beforehand, with the auction being a public way to signal the end of a marriage.

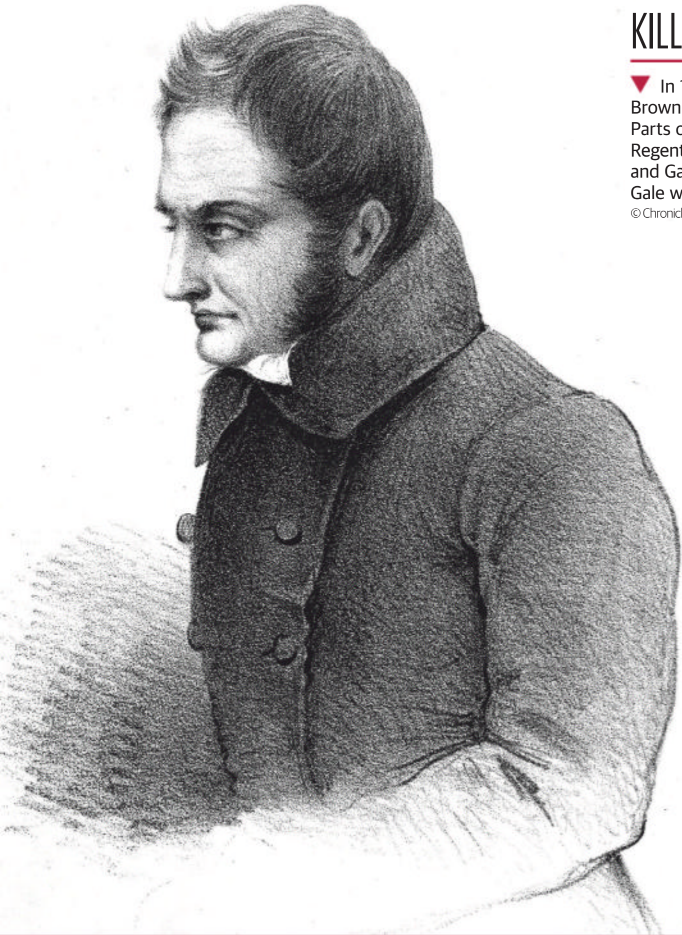
© Heritage Image Partnership Ltd/Alamy Stock Photo

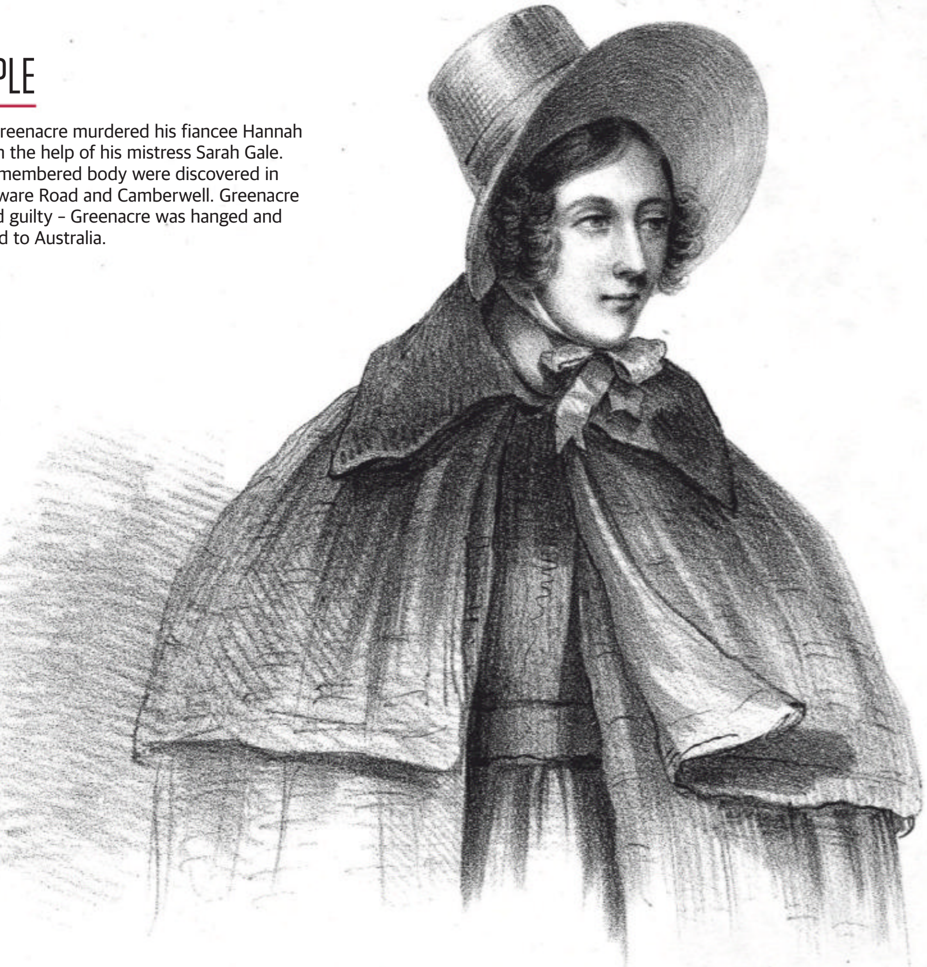

SELLING A WIFE.
Published March 1 1816 by Sherwood & Co Paternoster Row

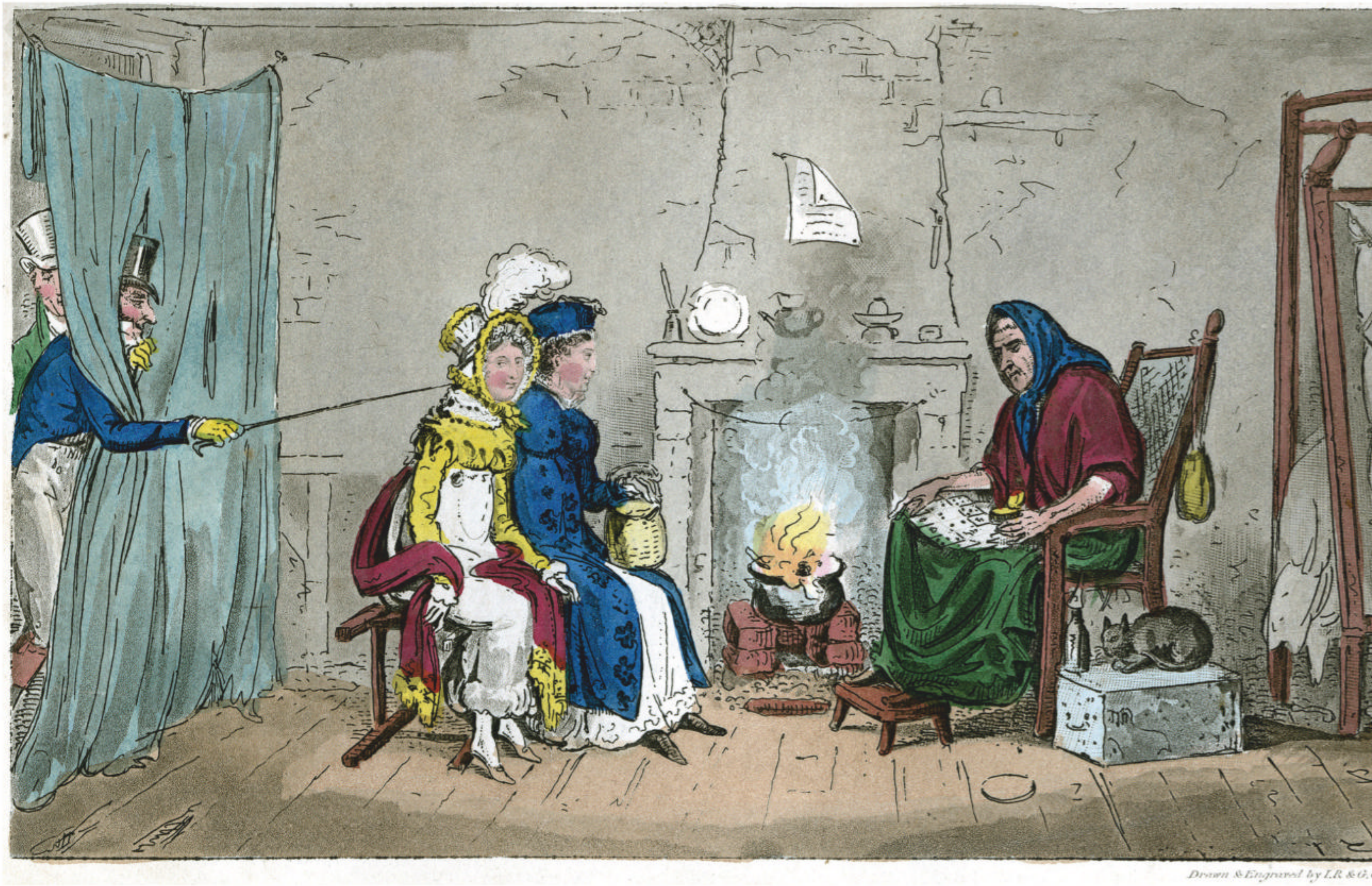
KILLER COUPLE

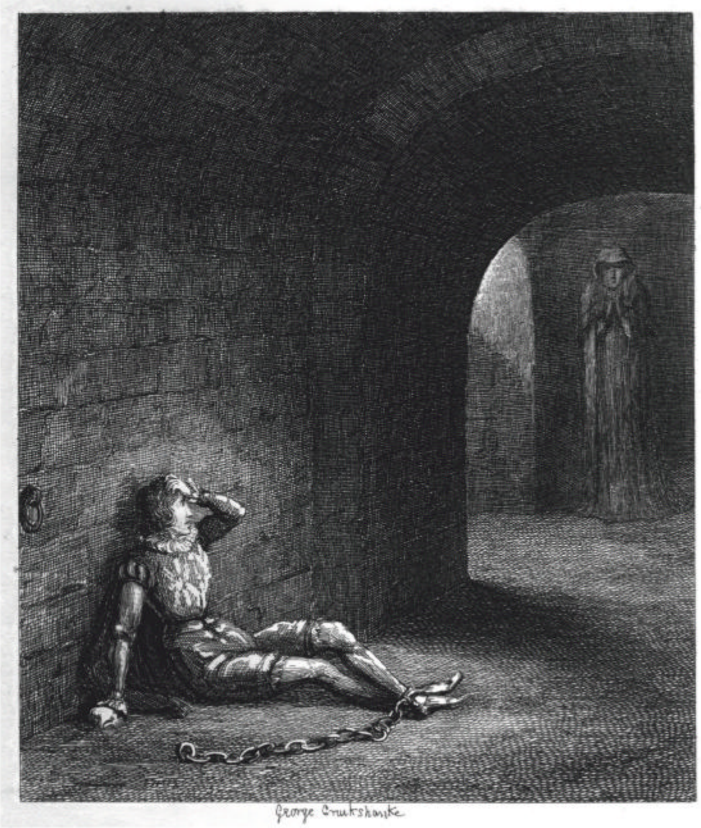
▼ In 1836 James Greenacre murdered his fiancee Hannah Brown, possibly with the help of his mistress Sarah Gale. Parts of Brown's dismembered body were discovered in Regent's Canal, Edgware Road and Camberwell. Greenacre and Gale were found guilty – Greenacre was hanged and Gale was transported to Australia.

© Chronicle/Alamy Stock Photo






Drawn & Engraved by I.R & G.



SPOOKY SPECTRES

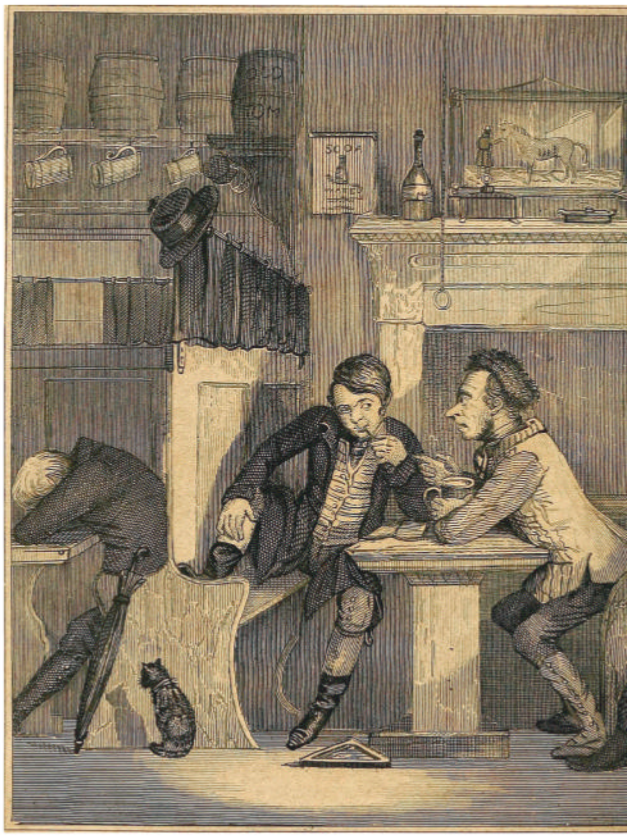
◀ The Tower of London has been the location of many ghostly sightings throughout the centuries. Tudor royals Anne Boleyn and Lady Jane Grey and noblewoman Arbella Stuart have been spotted by various witnesses, and the spirits of Sir Walter Raleigh and Guy Fawkes are also said to lurk within.

© The Print Collector/Alamy Stock Photo

JACK THE BAD LAD

▶ Pictured here in an ale house, John 'Sixteen String Jack' Rann was a highwayman who terrorised the people of London in the late 18th century. The thief was known for his extravagant lifestyle, flamboyant dress sense and charming personality. Rann was convicted of robbery and hanged in 1774.

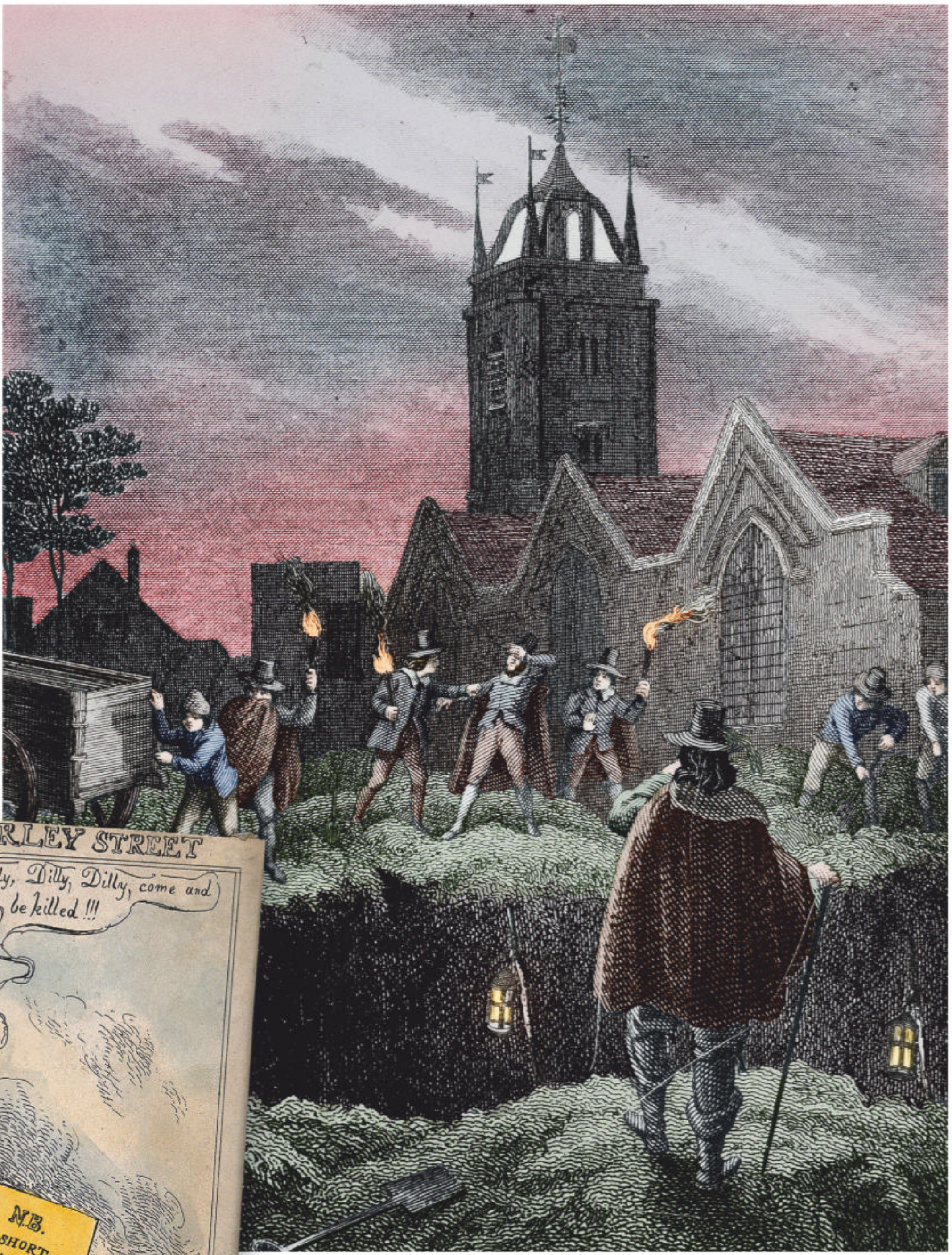
© Reading Room 2020/Alamy Stock Photo



Cruikshank.

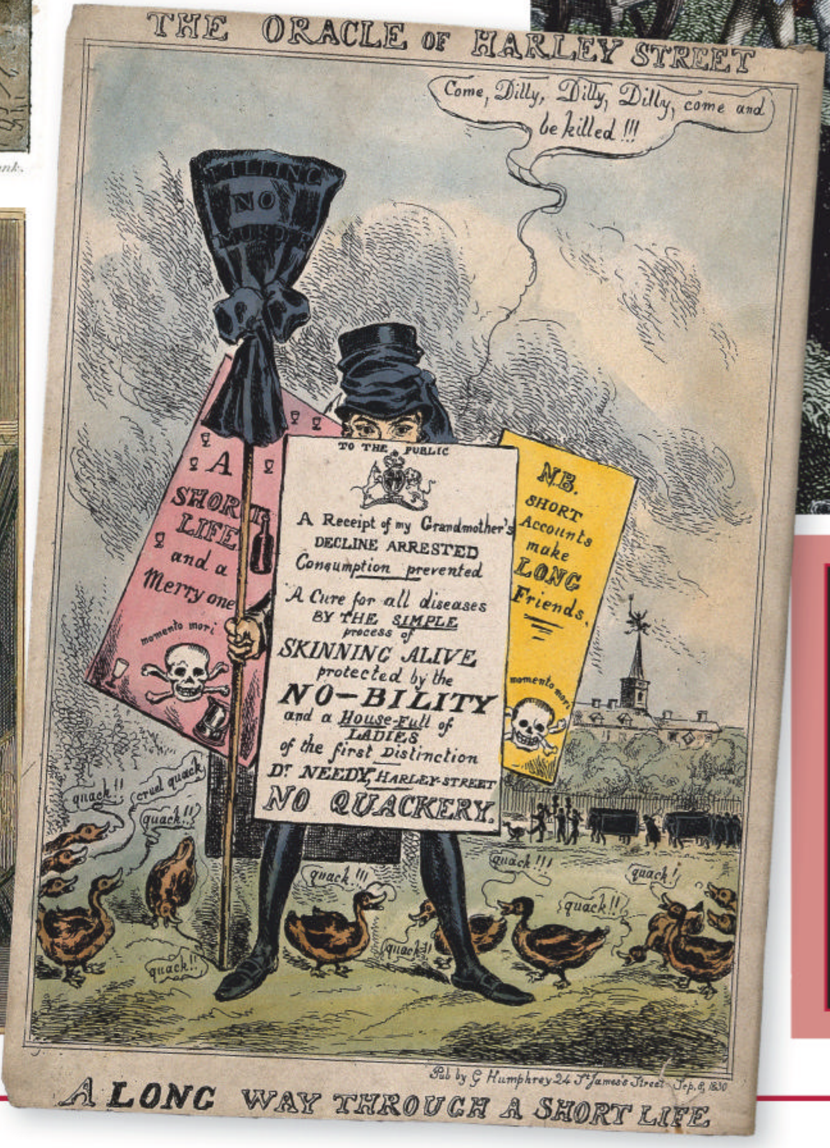
MISFORTUNE TELLERS

◀ In 1736 it became a criminal offence in England to claim to have magical powers. As a result, a number of fortune tellers were prosecuted, including a woman named Ellen Morgan, who was transported to Australia in 1834 after taking money as a fee for fortune telling.
© Authentic - Originals/Alamy Stock Photo



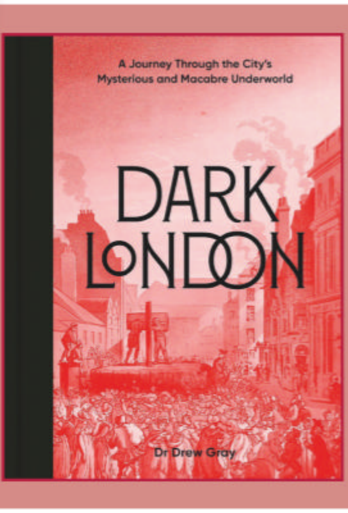
PLAGUE PITS

▶ This image shows men burying plague victims in London in 1665. In that year, 68,596 people were killed by the disease, as recorded in the London Bills of Mortality.
© The Print Collector/Alamy Stock Photo


THE ORACLE OF HARLEY STREET
Come, Dilly, Dilly, Dilly, come and be killed !!!
KILLING NO MURDER
A SHORT LIFE and a Merry one
momento mori
TO THE PUBLIC
A Receipt of my Grandmother's DECLINE ARRESTED Consumption prevented A Cure for all diseases BY THE SIMPLE process of SKINNING ALIVE protected by the NO-BILITY and a House-Full of LADIES of the first Distinction Dr NEEDY, HARLEY-STREET NO QUACKERY.
NB. SHORT Accounts make LONG Friends.
momento mori
quack!!
cruel quack
quack!!
quack!!!
quack!!!
quack!
quack!!!
quack!
quack!!
Pub by G Humphrey 24 St James's Street Sep. 6, 1830
A LONG WAY THROUGH A SHORT LIFE

DODGY DOCTOR

▼ In the 19th century, 'medical professional' John St John Long claimed to have found a cure for tuberculosis. He was convicted of manslaughter in 1830 after one of his patients died as a result of his treatments. This satirical print shows the quack (ie fraudulent) doctor surrounded by ducks.
© Wellcome Collection

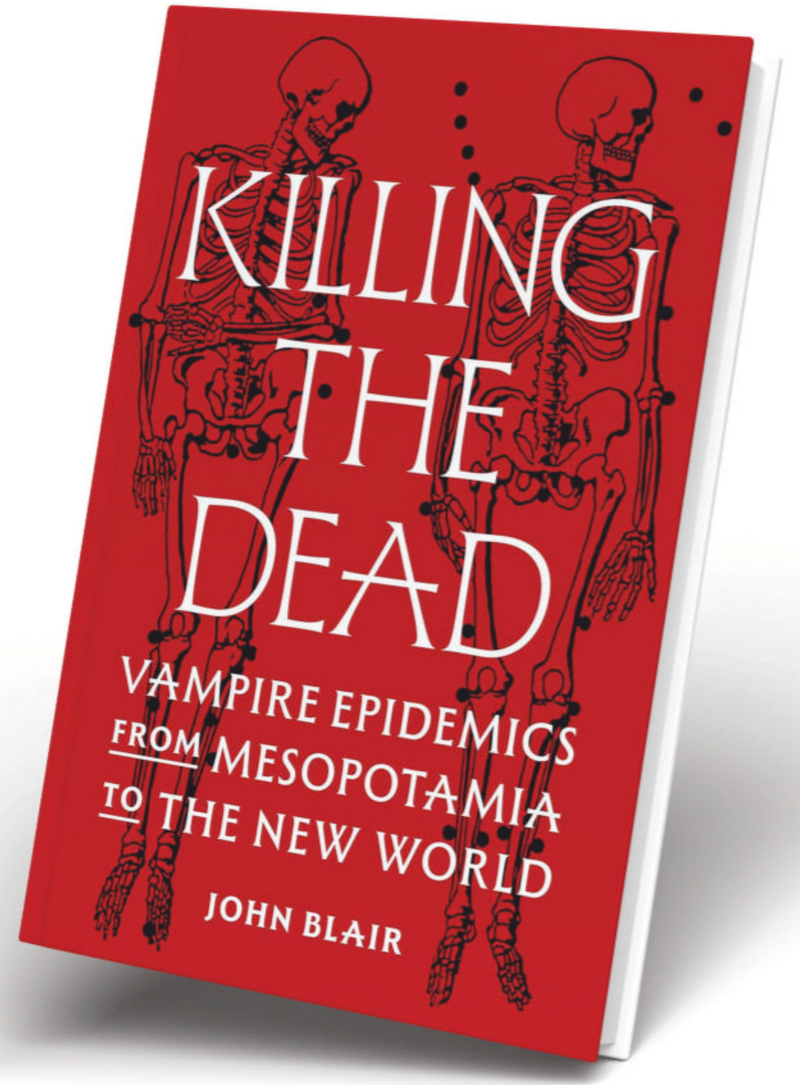

A Journey Through the City's Mysterious and Macabre Underworld
DARK LONDON
Dr Drew Gray

Dark London: A Journey Through the City's Mysterious and Macabre Underworld by Dr Drew Gray is out now from Frances Lincoln

KILLING THE DEAD

A mature and wide-ranging exploration of undead folklore

Author: John Blair
Publisher: Princeton University Press
Price: £30
Released: Out now



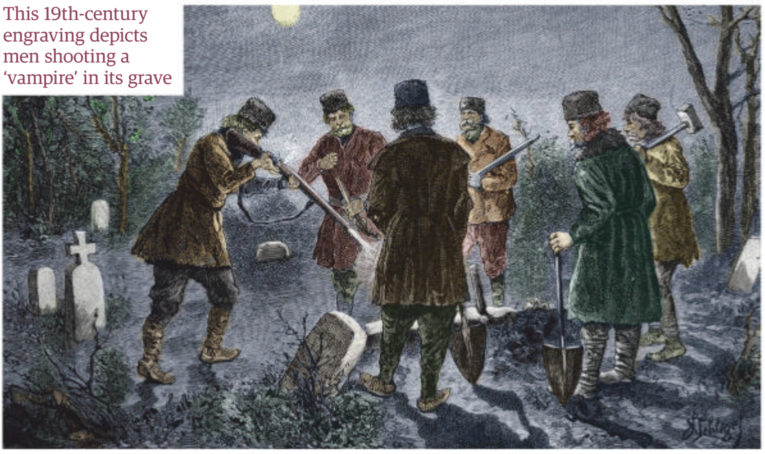
Vampires and their ilk have been haunting the minds of humanity for centuries. Whether it's the countless retellings of *Dracula*, the 2010 craze with *Twilight* or the chilling domestic invaders of 2025's hit movie *Sinners*, our cultural obsession, much like the creatures themselves, has refused to die. What is behind humanity's obsessive fear of the dead returning, not to reunite with their loved ones but to feed upon them? Oxford fellow John Blair's *Killing the Dead* is a new history of vampirism throughout the millennia and attempts to provide the answers.

The origins of the undead are more than just spooky tales to terrify children. Throughout history, societies have embraced the idea that the deceased, unwillingly or otherwise, are returning from their graves to torment the living. These epidemics have lingered in the collective consciousness, sometimes becoming longstanding folklore we repeat today. At times of great stress and upheaval, they even resulted in physical attacks and trials of corpses believed to be causing strife in communities. In 7th century England, several women's corpses were dug up and mutilated only weeks after their burial, while in 19th-century New England, fears of consumption as a supernatural force led to the destruction of almost 100 bodies. Blair links such 'corpse killing' with the infamous witch trials, a parallel interestingly explored in this work, where gender and violence are key themes.

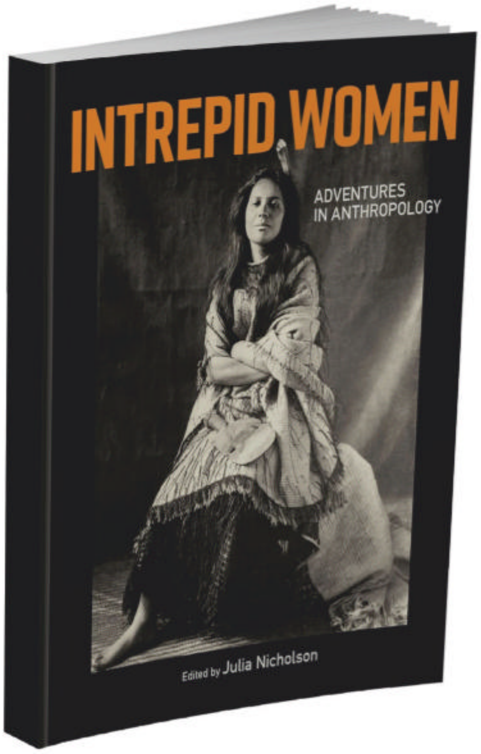
As a history of the undead concept, *Killing the Dead* looks as far back as the cradle of civilisation to understand that our fear of the reanimated is in our very bones. Blair looks upon the subject holistically, drawing from a vast range of historical cultures to understand the widespread practices of corpse killing. An Oxford professor specialising in Anglo-Saxon Southern England, Blair concedes early that vampirism is not his career's expertise but a subject he has long sought to explore. He has therefore surveyed numerous academics and experts in their fields to present a variety of cultures and their experiences around death.

This wide-ranging research is indicative of the work as a whole, which seeks to present this evocative subject seriously and maturely. We found it a well-reasoned survey of a topic that Blair is attempting to legitimise as an area of cultural importance, beyond books and movies about dramatic Gothic murderers.

The book is structured academically. The first half consists of foundation-laying sections where key terms, definitions and theories are defined, allowing you to understand their use in the later histories. At first, this analysis is focused on global trends in folklore, attempting to draw wider parallels in these stories' origins. Later sections look at different regions in greater detail to understand the specifics of their undead and associated rituals. It is here that the historian shines, drawing links and assessments from myths around the world to weave together disparate ideas into the recurring monsters we still whisper of today. *Killing the Dead* is an excellent academic history for those seeking a serious understanding of the monsters inside humanity. ***CH***


This 19th-century engraving depicts men shooting a 'vampire' in its grave

© Getty Images



INTREPID WOMEN

An intriguing look into the lives of six adventurous female anthropologists

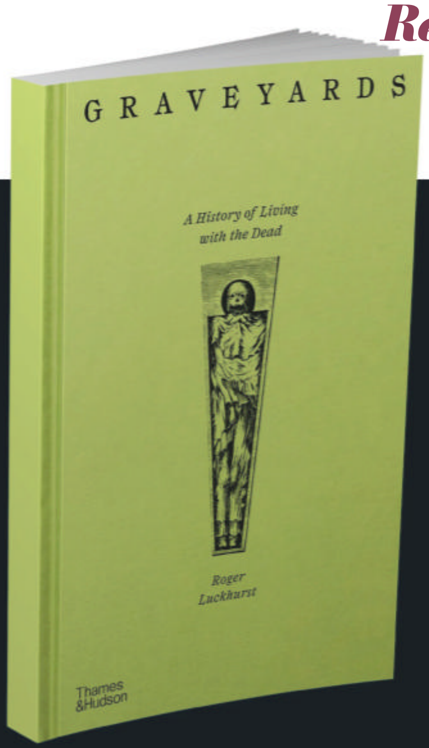
Edited by: Julia Nicholson
Publisher: Bodleian Library Publishing
Price: £25
Released: Out now

The Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford is a unique institution, operating unlike any other museum since it opened in 1884. A vast collection of fascinating objects, artefacts and documents all arranged together in cabinets with other articles from across time and place, the Pitt Rivers is home to many extraordinary historic collections.

Among them are the works left behind by a number of adventurous women who, in the first half of the 20th century, defied the era's strict societal rules and conventions and travelled across the globe to undertake groundbreaking anthropological studies.

In *Intrepid Women: Adventures in Anthropology*, their stories and the importance of their studies are brought to life through the photographs and artefacts they left behind. Barbara Freire-Marreco, Maria Czaplicka, Beatrice Blackwood, Mākereti Papakura, Elsie McDougall and Ursula Graham Bower all spent time living in communities that were unfamiliar to them, from the villages of Papua New Guinea to the Naga Hills of India, while broadening their understanding of the world and the people in it. Their lives and work are explored here in a series of essays.

Filled with incredible tales and a selection of amazing photographs taken by the women on their expeditions, alongside pictures of the artefacts they brought back, *Intrepid Women* is a comprehensive account of six courageous female anthropologists, their experiences in diverse communities and their legacies that inform us to this day. Edited by Julia Nicholson, former curator at the Pitt Rivers Museum, this is an intriguing and informative read. ***ES***



GRAVEYARDS:

A HISTORY OF LIVING WITH THE DEAD

Digging up our relationship with the dead and buried

Author: Roger Luckhurst
Publisher: Thames & Hudson
Price: £30
Released: Out now

If there's one certainty in life, then it's death. Reminders of our ultimate demise are consistently around us, from the loss of loved ones to depictions in the media. But the most potent are the burial grounds that litter the globe, where potentially billions of human remains are memorialised.

Roger Luckhurst is highly regarded as a historical expert on anything Gothic and grisly, having previously written books on the development of the 'Mummy's Curse' narrative and a cultural history of zombies. So it seems natural for him to turn his attention to not only an exploration of graveyards but also an expert examination of humanity's relationship with death as a whole.

Graveyards: A History of Living With the Dead covers plenty of ground, exploring everything from Egyptian mummification to 20th century war memorials. His approach throughout is thought-provoking but also respectful. Of course, sections of the book can be upsetting or gruesome, unavoidable given the subject matter, but Luckhurst always handles these aspects with care. There is a slight floweriness to his prose ("the dead shadow my steps wherever I go") but it suits the occasionally poetic tone of the work as a whole.

The book is complemented by lavish full-colour illustrations that decorate every page and, occasionally, are given full-page or even two-page spreads. The choice of illustrations reflects the tastefulness with which this superb work has been composed. Luckhurst's *Graveyards* is a breathtaking book, vast in scope and elegantly written. ***CM***

NUREMBERG
tiff
ZURICH

NUREMBERG

The Nazi trials after WWII are dramatised like never before

Certificate: 12A
Director: James Vanderbilt
Cast: Rami Malek, Russell Crowe, Michael Shannon
Released: 14 November

This is very much a film with the world today on its mind as well as the post-Second World War Nazi trials. The quote at the end of the movie from philosopher RG Collingwood puts it succinctly: "The only clue as to what man can do is what man has done." A timely reminder of our species' seeming inability to learn lessons from the past.

There have been several titles made about the Nuremberg trials, which saw surviving Nazi top brass put before an international court for crimes against humanity. Notable entries include Stanley Kramer's starry Hollywood production *Judgement at Nuremberg*, a fictionalisation of events, and Mick Jackson's TV mini-series *Nuremberg*, starring Alec Baldwin as chief prosecutor Robert Jackson and Brian Cox as Herman Göring. Filmmakers are drawn to the topic because it provokes deep questions regarding humankind's capacity – and sometimes what feels like lust – for horror.

Philosopher and journalist Hannah Arendt coined the term "banality of evil", which has since been misused and misquoted endlessly, as if to reduce evil itself to a banal or common act. It isn't what she meant at all. Evil committed on the industrial death machine level implemented by the Third Reich required big thinking but, equally, thousands of unthinking underlings to carry it out via a bureaucratic system which ran, horrifyingly, like clockwork. SS extermination camp leaders such as Franz Stangl (subject to a superb book by Gitta Sereny, *Into that Darkness*) referred to human beings as cargo, and bureaucrats such as Adolf Eichmann operated a system of slaughter like they were running a freight business. That's the banality, the disconnect. And that's what *Nuremberg* examines succinctly; it asks what makes a person so fanatical that they are willing to subsume their humanity completely and willingly. The answers are chilling and relevant to today, as director James Vanderbilt seeks to point out.

The film's main narrative focus is on American psychiatrist Douglas Kelley, played by Rami Malek. Kelley died by suicide after the war and he is depicted as tightly wound, sometimes supremely cocksure, but he did groundbreaking work. He's tasked by military leadership with psychoanalysing the surviving Nazi war criminals in order to gain insights into their thinking, and he develops something mimicking a friendship with Russell Crowe's Hermann Göring.

Their meetings are not unlike Clarice Starling talking to Hannibal Lecter in *The Silence of the Lambs*. It provides the film with a canny hook that previous Nuremberg-themed movies only skimmed across. Göring wasn't a raging anti-Semite like Julius Streicher (whose death by hanging is shown with gruesome relish, including the urine dripping from his trouser legs); Göring was arrogant, a narcissist, and his crucial sense of soldier's honour provides the audience with a psychological profile of a man who always believed he was doing the right thing. He could not see the world beyond his sense of German pride and supremacy. Crowe's accent isn't the best, but he does a good job showing the shades and nuances of Göring's inflated personality. ***MC***

© Alamy

ARGENTINA, 1985

Director: Santiago Mitre **Starring:** Ricardo Darín, Peter Lanzani, Alejandra Flechner **Country:** Argentina **Year:** 2022

Does this restaging of the Trial of the Juntas stick to the evidence?

RICARDO DARÍN PETER LANZANI
ARGENTINA
1985
A FILM BY SANTIAGO MITRE
prime video

B+
HISTORY
Sticks pretty closely to the facts, even using archive footage.

A
HOLLYWOOD
For a film about a dark topic, there's great humanity and humour.

OVERALL
A
VERDICT

01 The film follows the investigation and prosecution of the leaders of Argentina's military juntas (1976-83) by Julio César Strassera (Darín). He's portrayed as reluctant and uneasy about taking on the case, which appears to be true to his feelings at the time.

02 Having been turned down by seasoned lawyers and prosecutors, or rejecting them for being sympathetic to the old regime, Strassera and his deputy Luis Moreno Ocampo (Lanzani) really did turn to recent graduates to fill out their research team.

03 One common complaint about the film is that it doesn't give enough credit to campaigners, such as the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. They do appear in one scene wearing their scarves with the names of their missing children, which they're asked to remove for the trial.

04 Ocampo's family has close ties with the military and he is ostracised by them, but a turning point comes when his mother calls him to express her dismay at some of the televised testimony. According to the real Ocampo, this is accurate to her change of heart.

05 Strassera closes out the Trial of the Juntas with a lengthy closing argument taken directly from the historical record, ending with the phrase "nunca mas", which means "never more/again". This was the common chant of protestors who helped end the regime.

All images: © Alamy

RECIPE

AJOBLANCO

SPAIN, 15TH CENTURY TO PRESENT

Prep time: 15 mins
Refrigeration time: 2 hours

- **170g blanched almonds**
- **720ml cold water**
- **1 clove of garlic**
- **150g stale bread without crust, cut into 2cm cubes**
- **7ml sherry vinegar**
- **22ml extra virgin olive oil**
- **Green grapes, sliced**
- **Bunch of fresh mint, chopped**
- **Crush roasted almonds**
- **Salt and pepper to taste**

Spanish cuisine still carries some of the influences of its Muslim history. One crop that was introduced into the region by Muslims was almonds, which make up a key component in ajoblanco – 'white gazpacho'. Like gazpacho, ajoblanco is a cold soup, but it makes use of almonds alongside garlic and other ingredients, since using nuts in cooking was common in the Arabic world from this era.

The base of the soup, with its garlic, oil and bread, may have some links to Roman dishes from the ancient world, which would have been found on the Iberian peninsula. Ajoblanco predates traditional gazpacho, which contains tomatoes, since tomatoes didn't arrive in Spain until after Columbus' return from the New World. This soup remains popular in southern Spain, where almonds are a dominant crop.

01 Add the almonds, water and garlic to a blender and mix well on high speed until they become a milky consistency.

02 Then add the bread cubes to the blender and mix again until smooth.

03 Add the sherry vinegar and olive oil at this stage along with a little salt and mix together.

04 For an even smoother consistency, consider using a fine mesh sieve to strain the mixture.

05 Pour the mixture into an airtight container and transfer to the fridge until it's well chilled, likely up to two hours, but for as long as you need (up to two days).

06 Before serving, cut some green grapes in half lengthwise. Toss them with a little oil along with the mint and crushed almonds.

07 Before serving the soup, add salt and pepper to taste and additional cold water if the consistency is too thick. Pour into a chilled bowl and top with the grapes and almonds, and a drizzle of olive oil.

NEXT ISSUE
AUSTEN'S ENGLAND
ON SALE 27 NOV

All images: © Getty Images

THE
ALL ABOUT HISTORY
LIBRARY
IS
NOW
OPEN!
FULL DIGITAL ACCESS*
OVER 80 ISSUES!
SUBSCRIBE NOW!

Are you an All About History subscriber? Good news! You now have access to over 80 full digital issues of the magazine, dating back to May 2017.

VISIT WWW.MAGAZINESDIRECT.COM/AAH FOR MORE INFORMATION

***Terms and conditions:** Please allow up to six weeks for delivery of your first subscription issue (up to eight weeks overseas). *Access to the digital library will end with your subscription. For full terms and conditions, visit www.magazinesdirect.com/terms. For enquiries please call: +44 (0) 330 333 1113. Lines are open Monday-Friday 8:30am-7pm, and Saturday 10am-3pm UK time (excluding Bank Holidays) or email: help@magazinesdirect.com. Calls to 0330 numbers will be charged at no more than a national landline call, and may be included in your phone provider's call bundle.

Image: © Getty Images

WHIZZ KIDZ
We're here for young wheelchair users

Jasper,
age 11
I'm young, disabled, but not so different

The right wheelchair is the real difference

Did you know there are over **75,000** young people in the UK who need wheelchairs to get around?

They have the same **dreams** as other young people. But they don't always have the same **opportunities** because they can't access the equipment, skills and support they need.

9006

Find out how you can be there for young wheelchair users at **whizz-kidz.org.uk**

Registered with FUNDRAISING REGULATOR

Registered charity no. 802872 & SC042607